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Living communally furthers the Kingdom

Amyann Faul Groen and Shawn Groen

Unless we rethink the western standard of success, we will never be able to experience the kind of love, acceptance, community and wholeness that Jesus introduced to the world in the concept of the Kingdom of God. That's a strong statement. And it is true. It's also one of the reasons why Shawn and I moved into the Guise Street Intentional Community House – a place that's been influenced by Shane Claiborne's Simple Way movement, which began in Philadelphia.

Essential to Shane Claiborne's message is the belief that the Kingdom of God is already here (though not in its fullness); therefore, another world is possible! If Christians truly believe this, it will change their everyday behaviour; it will alter the course of their whole lives, and it will, as Claiborne holds, begin an *irresistible revolution*. Those who

See **Guise House** *on page 2*

My garage is not an altar:
Christians and the cult of the car

Chris Steenhof

SMITHERS, B.C. – North American Christians have a complex relationship with the automobile. We're part of a larger culture that worships the automobile, making the very act of driving something akin to a religious ritual. On the other hand, Christians are aware of the tremendous impact that automobiles – and the infrastructure and industry surrounding them – have on our planet. We're left in a bit of an uncomfortable and precarious position.

In many ways, this explains why Christians often separate their driving habits (car purchases, for example) from their faith. A few years ago, when the bumper sticker *What Would Jesus Drive* was making the rounds, some people were offended by what seemed a trivial and frivolous jingle. But perhaps this phrase is an important reminder that our driving practices and behavior are intricately tied to our faith walk. In effect, the vehicles in our church parking lots may say something about who we are.

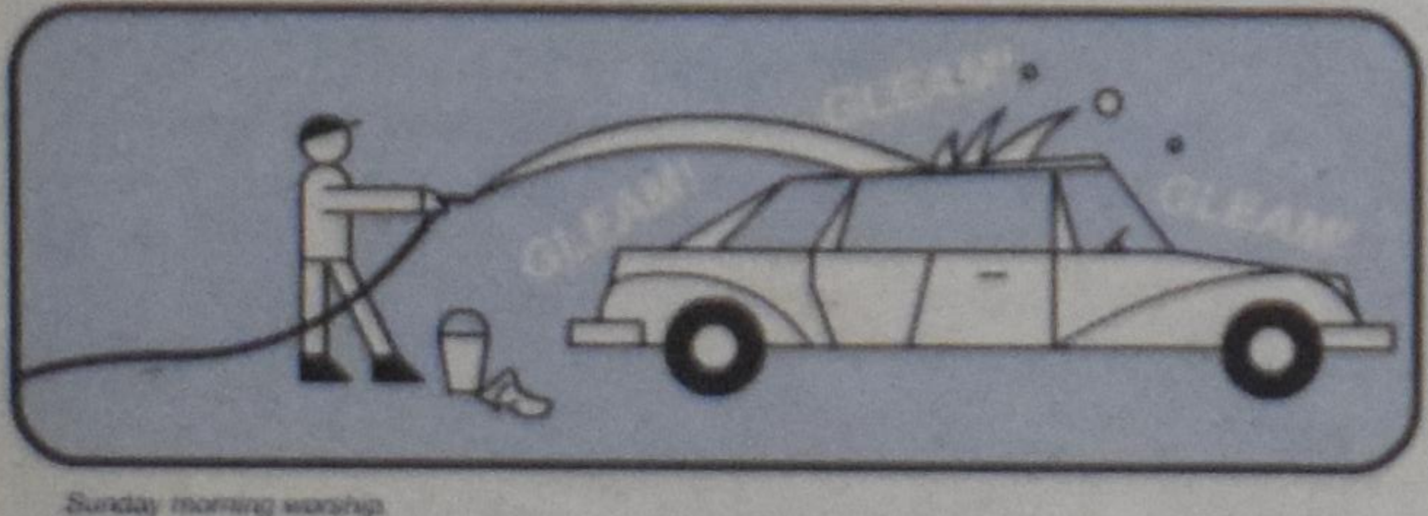
We would be blind if we didn't see what an important role the car plays in our daily lives. One writer estimates that we spend more than four hours daily either driving in our cars or working to pay for our cars and their use: upkeep, depreciation, gasoline, insurance, and so on. Americans make 16 billion trips to the gas station a year, consuming over 4500 litres per household. Our communal blood pressure skyrockets with the latest increase in the price of gas.

Ecological implications

It's impossible to ignore the effect that the automobile is having on our world. Ecologically, most scientists link the reality of global warming with the increased level of CO2 in the environment. The Environmental Defense Fund estimates that in 2004, American cars emitted 20,000 pounds of C02. In many urban centres, smog is literally choking the life right out of us.

Other important considerations surround the area of energy use and oil dependence. The spike of crude oil prices in the summer of 2008 came as a shock to many North Americans. Since then, proponents of Peak Oil theory have become much more popular. This theory states that we have reached the maximum of conventional oil production worldwide, leading to a period where supply cannot keep up with demand. This theory's supporters strongly encourage leaders to begin weaning North Americans from their fossil fuel dependence towards other forms of energy.

See **Cars** *on page 2*



Sunday morning worship

Theme issue: Simple living

"Clothesline," rendered photograph by Meredith K.C. Gipson Hoogendam

News

Guise House *continued from page 1*

come into contact with these revolutionaries will be intrigued by their authentic lives. But how do we accomplish that? How do we, in fact, become the revolution? This is the very thing that Claiborne and his fellows are concerned with. It involves *rethinking* the standard practices and cultural assumptions that have been handed down to us.

Kick-starting the revolution

It begins with questions. How can we rethink our economics in order to benefit not just those with the power and means to benefit themselves, but also to benefit those who can barely help themselves? How can Christ's concept of forgiveness enter the economic realm? How can we live in a deeper relationship with the rest of creation in a way that will give us the ears to hear God speaking through his creation? This revolution is not focused on changing systemic problems, but about recognizing that we already live in the Kingdom of God; and so we are called to live under the principles of this Kingdom. As Claiborne says, "We might live in the best Babylon that the world has ever seen, but we are still called to come out if it."

The Kingdom principles pivot on three relationships: our relationship with God, with the Earth, and with each other (our neighbours). Claiborne's philosophy revolves around *creatively rethinking* how we go about doing things. This translates, for Claiborne, into hosting a Jubilee celebration on Wall Street. In one of his stories, a businessman felt internally convicted that the way he had made his money was unjust. He didn't consider it his money, so he gave the Simple Way $20,000 in bills and change and the gang celebrated the festival of Jubilee by tossing this money onto Wall Street (as in Leviticus 25). The streets were literally paved in silver. Homeless folk were finally able to fill their prescriptions, and janitors could get their cavities filled!

On a more practical scale, Kingdom principles could mean converting your vehicle to biodiesel (so that it runs off waste veggie oil), or starting a community garden. It could mean hosting a potluck dinner for your neighbourhood once in a while, or sharing extra blankets (or perhaps an extra futon) with a homeless person. In short, Kingdom principles revolve around "knowing thy neighbour" – they revolve around relationships.

Kingdom activism

A revolution can begin with one person, but it cannot stay there. It must be born and fostered in community in order to take root and spread. One needs the encouragement and support of close others to maintain long-term vision and energy. For our Guise St. house, we have begun this revolution by living in intentional community. It makes sense – and cents. Electricity bills become affordable. Our phone and internet expenses become manageable. In community we can afford to buy higher-quality food and to make ethical purchases. At the Guise Commune we choose to live a lifestyle not driven by the bottom line; instead, we make effort to spend quality time together – over food, homemade wine, and with company.

One of the biggest critiques of the Simple Way lifestyle is that it seems limited to young, single people. But you don't have to be young and single to adopt the spirit of the Kingdom lifestyle! Neighbours can begin by sharing a lawn mower, hand tools or a wood shop. Another intentional community at our church shares their cars, and their coffee roaster. Families can congregate for dinner on occasion, perhaps even once a month. A few couples could choose to buy a local food box share to get their intake of locally-produced fruits and veggies while curbing the cost.

We are in the beginning stages of our intentional community experiment, and we are just learning what it means to invest in – and commit to – each other and a place. Building relationships with and learning to know the needs of your neighbour are radical in our individualistic society. They are part of a Kingdom activism. When this small activism is done from your heart, it *will* change your behaviour today, and, indeed, the course of your life.

Amyann Faul Groen and Shawn Groen have, since August, shared a house in the Hamilton Harbour with six other people and one turtle.

For more on contemporary communal living, see see Craine's article on Madonna House on page 6 and Tombari's interview with Crystle, page 7.

Cars *continued from page 1*

There are other reasons why our consumption of fossil fuels should raise red flags for Christians. For one, North American Christians must struggle with the worldwide imbalance of energy use. In 2006, China had 22 million cars for a population of approximately 1.3 billion people. In North America, there are more cars than drivers. This disparity is worse when comparing developed nations to developing nations, which should concern Christians in the west.

It's a complex situation – not one with an easy or quick solution. But, far too often, this complexity makes us throw up our hands and admit defeat without engaging the problem. Christians have taken successful small steps to challenge a dependence on the automobile, grappling as they do so with their responsibilities to God's world and to their local and global fellow citizens (see sidebar).

Technology won't save the world

But changing technology is only a small part of the problem. Writers such as McKibben suggest that many of our ecological problems stem from our idolatrous habit of putting things where only God belongs. Perhaps if we begin to understand that our concepts of status and prestige are intertwined with our collective fascination with the automobile, some of our habits might change.

One place to start is the amount we drive. Ninety percent of trips in our automobiles are less than two kilometres in length. By adding one passenger to every car, Americans would save over 132 million litres of gas annually. As a culture, much of our driving is unnecessary and avoidable, and the remedy for this problem is not as hard to tackle as peak oil.

Some municipal governments in Canada and the United States have moved to a four day workweek to save on expenses and to reduce the total commuting time for employees. Other people are working out of their home or reducing the number of vehicles they own. Some of these changes might lead to a more simplistic, more God-centered lifestyle.

One interesting development arising from higher gas prices is the advent of hypermiling: driving techniques which improve fuel efficiency. Many of the methods advocated by hypermiling – such as driving the speed limit, not accelerating too quickly, and keeping tires inflated to the proper pressure – are important because they increase safety as well. Some techniques, however, like riding in the slipstream of transport trucks, border on the illegal and are certainly not advisable.

Maybe more Christians should question the very concept of car ownership. It's hard to wade through the thousands of car commercials we are exposed to yearly without being swept away by the false promises of worth, status, and social standing inherent in these ads. But organizations like Cooperative Auto Network in Vancouver are offering viable alternatives. In that instance, members share vehicles owned by the cooperative, paying a membership fee and a usage fee. While the cost of running a personal vehicle is now close to sixty cents per kilometer, that amount is drastically reduced for members of the cooperative.

Would North America look differently if Christians tried to think biblically about automobiles and all the complex issues surrounding their use? Placing God at the centre of our lives might make us reconsider some of our assumptions about car ownership, our use of dwindling natural resources, and the number of kilometers we drive. These are not easy questions but perhaps as a result of our reflections we may experience a surprising result: a return to a simpler, more sustainable and happier lifestyle.

Chris Steenhof is a teacher and administrator who lives in Smithers, British Columbia.

Technological possibilities

Bill McKibben, a Christian environmentalist, suggests that it is time for North American Christians to think seriously about which cars they drive. One of his more attention-grabbing statistics is that if you switched from a typical midsize-car to a typical SUV, your extra energy usage in one year would be equivalent to leaving your bathroom light on for three decades.

Many Christians have, in response, pursued more environmentally friendly solutions. One possibility is the hybrid, which combines the typical combustion motor with an electric motor and uses other technologies to reduce fuel consumption and emissions. Electric cars (run by battery alone with no internal combustion motor) are currently being produced by some of the major car companies. Vehicles powered by hydrogen may also be a possibility in the near future.

Critics, of course, point to some of the inherent problems with these new technologies. Electric cars have a limited range, extremely expensive batteries, and will put tremendous stress on the electrical grid. Hydrogen cars require a separate infrastructure from our present system. And while these criticisms hold weight, finding solutions to our car problem will necessarily require this type of innovative thinking.

Eternal Student
Peter Schuurman

Getting your life in order

Simplicity is not only about cutting out complexity. It is about ordering the pieces of your life aright.

This struck me with startling clarity in a short quote from Gordon Dahl's book *Work, Play and Worship* (1972). He describes middle-class North Americans as people who "tend to worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship." If that is a reflection of our lifestyle, it is sorely disordered.

Let's unpack that phrase. It claims that we "worship our work." Douglas Joblin, a lecturer in Religious Studies at Laurentian University in Sudbury who introduced me to Dalh's book, cites evidence of our increased work week, the growing phenomena of "workaholism" and the additional stresses of commuting, cell phones and internet. Jobs have become the primary objective of our political economy. "Work, in short, is the god of our system," he concludes.

I am reminded of the character Ricky in the film *Holy Man* (1998) who prays fervently in his closet: "Good, better, best; never take a rest until my good is better and my better best." Feelings of inadequacy fuel our enthusiasm for the restless hamster wheel of work.

Play as work

If we worship our work, it inevitably takes over our lives to the point where we also "work at our play." What does that mean? Joblin explains how play can be a leisurely, spontaneous, carefree and cooperative venture, but in our society it has come to "mimic the very structured, organized, competitive and individualistic nature of work." Think of the white-collar workers using their lunch hour to sweat on a treadmill. Or the young people on my recreational soccer team who took performance enhancing drugs before the game and fought during the game. Or the pressure put on kids to make the "rep" teams and the pros.

Electronic games and TV mimic the lonely, competitive world of work, too. Industrialized, commercialized, they rarely reflect wholesome community play.

Worship as play

If work is what we worship, and play is an extension of work, then, finally, worship must be our time to play. What that suggests is that worship has become more of a hobby on the side, a distraction from the important stuff, or a means of escape. It can be "a game of pretend" where we sing in an unusual language that never permeates our weekday world rather than that which orders the whole of our lives.

What is the result of all this confused living? Dahl says what happens is that North Amer-ican "meanings and values are distorted, their relationships disintegrate faster than they can keep them in repair, and their life styles resemble a cast of characters in search of a plot."

In conclusion, Dahl maintains work first and foremost defines our lives. Note: since there is no mention of family or friends in this scheme, it is the fabric of our community that tatters. Education, study and reflection also slip to the side or are subsumed as "work," and so we are left without deep, extended examination of our predicament.

Generational trends

As I pondered this argument, I wanted to tweak a few parts. For Reformed folks, for example, I'll risk some broad generational nuances.

My grandparents, immigrants from Holland after the war, really put the community of faith first. Hard work and its profits were all channeled towards the church community and the Christian school. They tended to "work at their worship."

The next generation loosened its grip on the church and embraced work with abandon. I have heard some of the males of this generation, upon retirement, voice regrets at not spending enough time with their families. They "worshipped their work" as Dahl suggests.

Then more recently, some people in my own generation have put limits on work. We take parental leaves courtesy of the government. We religiously schedule holidays, and many prize travel and camping weekends. Church and work recede in significance to leisure. The new lingo is about "boundaries" and "margins."

In sum: Now that Dahl's book is over 35 years old, I would venture that leisure has significantly increased in value, and some of that is a healing balm. At worst, however, many now "worship their play, play at their work," and in so far as it is individualistic and rather routine, "work at their worship" (if they still attend a church).

Whenever God is replaced by something else, our lives get all jumbled up. The remedy is simple: keep yourself from idols (1 John 5:21). Then all the rest "will be added unto you" – that is, given its proper place.

Peter Schuurman lives in Guelph, Ontario where he parents his two children, Joseph and Petra. He is working toward a PhD and teaches World Religion at Redeemer.

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Northern Luzon isolated by flooding, landslides

cbm partners in the Philippines ask for prayer

Sandy Hazell

PHILIPPINES – Torrential rains from tropical storm Parma created widespread flooding and landslides in the northern Philippines, leaving 125 people dead and thousands of people homeless and stranded. As the storm swept over the island in early October, authorities were forced to release water from near-bursting dams.

Thousands of Filipinos clamoured to rooftops and scrambled to safety as floodwaters submerged their homes, highways and created landslides. The floods have now isolated northern Luzon from Manila. This storm followed just after Typhoon Ketsana battered residents of Manila with a month's worth of rain in twenty-four hours. Ketsana killed at least 300 people and made more than three million homeless.

"Christian Blind Mission (cbm)'s partners are asking us to pray," says Ed Epp, Executive Director of cbm Canada. "So many people have lost their homes, their loved ones, their livelihoods. Perhaps even their hope for the future."

cbm's Regional Office in Southeast Asia is currently assessing the needs, with situation reports from cbm's projects and services based in the typhoon-affected provinces. The pre-emptive evacuation of communities in high risk areas in the path of the typhoon helped to minimize casualties, but scores of displaced persons in the hardest hit areas now pose a daunting challenge for humanitarian action.

"cbm is providing emergency relief, medicines, psychosocial response and temporary settlement," says Epp. "We know that people with disabilities suffer the most; they can't get to emergency relief services. cbm's partners are on the ground ensuring these people are included in relief aid."

Back-to-back storms have pounded northern Philippines, creating the worst flooding in 40 years.

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Beware of toilet envy

Kirstin Vander Giessen-Reitsma

I saw an advertisement on television a while back – I think it was for Wal-Mart – in which a young woman was raving about all of the stuff she could buy at such "low" prices. It was pretty standard, until the closing sound byte: "Instead of keeping up with the Joneses, people are trying to keep up with you."

Honestly, I was shocked at the brazen admission of the advertisement's ultimate purpose. There was no enticement, no disguise, no excuse – simply an open acknowledgement that what we all want (apparently) is to be the person of whom everyone else is jealous. We all want more than our neighbor has. At best, I can only hope that such an open acknowledgement will serve as the end of denial and the beginning of the healing process for a nation glutted with stuff. At worst, the ad signals a shift away from any conflictedness about competitive acquisition to its open idolatry.

I often question whether my distaste for advertising and commercialism is really a quest for what's right and true or if it's just a natural result of my tastes in other areas. It's easy for me to be disgusted with chain stores when I really enjoy shopping at thrift stores. It's easy for me to elevate shopping locally to a virtue when I help run a local business myself. It's easy for me to desire simple living when I naturally enjoy log cabins, good books and biking, and there's something strangely appealing to me about surviving without electricity or running water. Rejecting the ads doesn't take any work for me – but being discerning does.

Out of love for God

We can easily elevate simple living to the point that it becomes as obsessive and unhealthy as a lifestyle of uncritical acquisitiveness. That gnawing feeling of dissatisfaction can occur whether we're striving for more or striving for less. The Jones family is still the Jones family, even when we're envying their solar power, geothermal heating and composting toilet.

What we must realize is that living simply is not about the particulars – eating organic foods, owning a fuel-efficient vehicle or living in a small house – but about cultivating a standard of living that is biblical. It's about shedding the cluttered mass of messages telling us that we need to acquire stuff in order to be fulfilled; to maintain ultimate control while indulging recklessly; to not only keep up with the Joneses, but *be* the Joneses. Instead, we seek to obey biblical directives to love God and others and to be stewards of God's good gift of creation. If our hearts are right in this pursuit, certain elements of our lives will be shaped in certain ways as we make decisions according to what will honor God in cultivating personal, social and environmental justice. A life lived in awareness of the necessary relationships to God and others should look drastically different from a life lived purely for the purpose of self-satisfaction.

Only humble beginnings

This awareness can, of course, lead to intense guilt ("I'm not doing enough to live simply") and anger ("Why doesn't anybody else get it?"), which is why steps toward simple living must be taken with patience, humility and grace. In a fallen world, the journey toward full individual or communal maturity will never be complete. It's helpful to find a small group of people who are headed in the same direction you are at about the same pace. It's also helpful and humbling to realize that, often, we can only satisfy one principle at a time.

When we were getting ready to open a fair trade store in 2003 and dealing with all of the details of having a retail space, I knew that I didn't want to use throw-away paper towels in the bathroom, for both environmental and economic reasons. So we set out in search of inexpensive washcloths that we could use as small hand towels. Alas! They were on sale at a great price, which meant more money could be invested in stocking the store with products from economically disadvantaged people around the world. Unfortunately, the cloths were manufactured in Pakistan, a country not known for its strong labor laws, and so I had to choose between ultimately imperfect options. But that's the point at which an acknowledgement of grace is necessary, along with a commitment to work toward a better culture that requires a choice between "the lesser of two evils."

I won't pretend that the fight against the tide of consumerism, materialism and narcissism will be instantly gratifying. Indeed, understanding the call to live simply according to biblical norms is a both a blessing and a curse in an imperfect world and there will be many times when we're ready to throw up our hands, give in to the direction of the tide and surrender to blissful indulgence in stuff. But God promises a much better kind of blessing to those who indulge in love and keep a loose grip on those things that moths and rust can easily destroy. The good news is out that Christ has already won the decisive victory; a new city is coming, and no fleet of monster SUVs can tow that revelation into reverse.

*Kirstin Vander Giessen-Reitsma is the editor of catapult magazine (www.catapultmagazine.com), a bi-weekly online publication of *culture is not optional. She and her husband Rob live in west Michigan, where they founded a fair trade store and work with college students. Sabbath activities include reading, biking and cooking with local produce.*

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Finding the gift to be simple

Bert Witvoet

The Shaker song "'Tis the gift to be simple" (See text box inside this editorial) equates simple living with freedom. The Shakers are on to something. All of us have experienced a loss of freedom brought about by choices that have us chasing after the wind. We try too hard to be happy instead of being content. We want more things instead of nurturing satisfaction with less. The gift of being simple eludes us. The Apostle Paul urges the Galatians not to turn their freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, which should be understood as a reference to soul-destroying appetites rather than legitimate pleasures of the body. Advertising lures us into such opportunities for the flesh, creating soul-destroying appetites. Oh for a simpler life in a healthier society that helps us retain our freedom!

A biblical concept

Simple living is something the Quakers and many Mennonites practice in spades. They equate simple living with the Christian life. It often sets them apart from other Christians, even in dress and language. It sometimes leads to a somewhat dreary, colourless appearance and behaviour, as they abhor current fashions and trends. But it also means they avoid many pitfalls of modern living, not the least of which are pressures to keep up with the Joneses, getting lost in the wilderness of ever-changing technology, and focusing too much on success and external beauty. Choosing to live according to their Testimony of Simplicity is like "coming down" from a frivolous life of needless adornments (think lipstick) and clutter (think cottages and RVs) to a level of peaceful living – a place "where we ought to be."

Being in the place where we ought to be is a biblical concept. God's words for our lives always point to the place where we find our greatest fulfilment. It spells out how simplicity helps us achieve that end.

"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" is one of those simplicity commands that can be found in Matthew 5:37. No need to make bombastic promises.

So is Proverbs 30:8-9, where Agur declares, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread."

Then in Luke 12 we find the parable of the rich fool, told in response to a man's materialistic concern about an inheritance. Jesus accompanies that with a warning: "A person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

The Bible is filled with words that help us celebrate the gift of being simple and being free.

Healthy tension

So much in life robs us of our freedom. So much becomes clutter: moral clutter, social clutter, mental clutter, pleasure clutter, time clutter, audio clutter, abdominal clutter, spiritual clutter. We fill up our too large houses to overflowing with stuff that doesn't help us and, in fact, hinders us from helping others. It robs us of our joy. Our God knows that finding ourselves in "the place just right" is like living in "the valley of love and delight."

For Reformed Christians the answer to the quest for simplicity is not quite as easy as it is for those who believe that they must shun the world and focus almost exclusively on their inner spiritual life. Dr. Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, likes to talk about the tension between singing "This is my Father's world" and singing "I am a stranger here within a foreign land, my home is far away upon a golden strand." Both songs are part of the total picture. And so those who want to be a leavening agent in their society are left with the dilemma of not isolating themselves from the world they live in with all its hectic developments while keeping in touch with the valley of love and delight.

This requires the gift of discernment in order to enjoy the gift to be free.

'Tis the gift to be simple,
'tis the gift to be free,
'tis the gift to come down
where we ought to be,
and when we find ourselves
in the place just right,
'twill be in the valley of
love and delight.

God knows for sure

I thoroughly enjoyed Hendrik Vlaar's article "Thirty-two cents" in the September 28 issue of *Christian Courier* about his encounter with a panhandler who asked for a specific amount of change to buy milk.

I have encountered my fair share of down-and-out folks begging for money in my 35 years as a long-haul trucker, especially the last 15 years or so years traveling through the American Southwest, where there seem to be so many more of them. The climate is more conducive to sleeping in a ditch or under a bridge, I suppose.

I am ashamed to admit that my initial human reaction when asked for money used to be a rather vulgar "f... ..f and get a job." But as I walked away, I found myself castigating myself for my unfeeling response. I am not one to memorize or quote Scripture, but a verse from Matthew, I believe, comes to mind. "As you have done for the least of these, you have done for me"

I cannot discern whether the small amount of money I now give to those who ask will feed bad habits or genuinely help someone in need. Only God knows for sure. I leave it in his hands to determine the use of those funds.

It is the least that those of us who are blessed with stable backgrounds and material possessions beyond what we really need can do for those who seem to have none of those things we all take for granted.

Dirk van Wyngaarden
Brantford, Ontario

The ugly health care debate in the US

I was somewhat surprised that Harold Alkema left out at least two significant aspects in the US debate about health reform (*Christian Courier* of Sept. 14). Racists oppose everything the president proposes, and they contribute to the ugliness of the debate. Moreover, quite a few opponents, Christians included, have made misguided and false statements. How can those statements be squared with Christian integrity? Many CRC members in the US vote Republican. Are they distancing themselves from this unchristian behavior? How does the whole debate show the implication of the commandment to love our neighbours as ourselves?

Bert den Boggende
Brooks, Alberta

Intelligent Christians give encouragement

I want to thank Jim Olthuis for his article, "Where there is love, there is vision: towards a Christian post-postmodern worldview," printed in the *Christian Courier* of September 14. I can't tell you what a feeling of joy it was for me to read in his article the summation of the ideas that have been dancing and converging in my mind for the past several years, and most especially last year as I completed my MA in English at Wilfrid Laurier University.

At Laurier, I did a project on Derrida and could not help but see the prismatic possibilities of relating deconstructionist theory to (post) postmodern understanding of Christianity. To me, it was as simple as shaving cream – the idea of Christ both dwelling within, existing before, and always moving beyond binary opposition. God as the space before language, that "primordial" space that Derrida refers to, but cannot reach. Christ behind, before – in whom all things are complete.

These ideas came up again when I dipped briefly into Levinas in my film course – a philosopher and philosophy of alterity touted by my very humanistic professor and one of the only areas in which the prof. and I seemed to meet eye to eye in terms of worldview. I also saw Christ in Bakhtin's ideas about the dialogic self – that we are all, always, negotiating our identities both as independent beings and as individuals forever in relationship and dialogue with one another, as Jim Olthuis so succinctly elucidates in his article.

I had some amazing and supportive profs. at Laurier, but there is a particular joy in reading the words of intelligent Christian (not a binary opposition!) scholars. Olthuis's words gave me courage, as they validate my hope that thoughtful believers exist within the bounds of the ivory tower (and outside as well, of course!).

Thank you, thank you!

Katie Hoogendam
Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario

Moments in chaplaincy ministry

Psalm 139:1 - 18

On his usual rounds in the hospital, he came to a ward where a male nurse asked the chaplain to come see his wife. "Of course," the chaplain assured him, and the next day he made the visit. He found a severely depressed woman who told him that she was pregnant and that she was planning an abortion. The chaplain prayed with her and asked her to hold off on the abortion for two more days. The lady agreed to the chaplain's request. Two days later, there was another visit. This time the chaplain asked the woman to pray. "I can't," she said," because I am planning to abort this pregnancy. It is an evil plan; I know God will punish me for it. Don't ask me to pray." Again the chaplain pleaded to postpone the abortion for a couple of days and after his prayer the woman agreed again.

For many days the chaplain visited the woman, asking her every time to postpone the abortion. Finally the pregnancy had progressed to a time that made abortion impossible. It was then that the woman's depression left her, and she asked the chaplain to baptize the child after its birth. "I do have a question," she asked. "Do you mind that if my child is a boy, I name him after you?" "I would be honoured," the chaplain said. At the baptism, the father carried the child to the baptismal font. The chaplain spoke the words of the ancient formula: "John, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Not many people noticed that when the chaplain took his seat, he was crying.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, be near to us when on the crossroads of life we are faced with difficult decisions, and guide us so that what we decide may be good and acceptable in your eyes.

Carl Tuyl *(ctuyl@rogers.com) is a retired minister living in Toronto, Ontario.*

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'Everything is prayer' for Catholics at Madonna House

Jenna Craine

"The Spirit of Madonna House is the beautiful and awesome spirit of the Gospel applied to daily living, without compromise."

So said Catherine Doherty, foundress of Madonna House (MH), a Catholic community of consecrated lay people founded in 1947. The staff choose to live in community, embracing promises of poverty, chastity and obedience. They follow God through prayer, manual labour, and service to the poor and the guests who visit them. There are currently over 200 MH staff living in the main location in Combermere, a tiny village in Northern Ontario, and 16 field houses throughout Canada, the United States, and abroad.

Julie Culshaw was only eighteen when she was inspired to visit MH. She had attended a retreat put on by an MH priest, and was so intrigued that she decided to go to Combermere and experience the community for herself. It was 1967.

"When I went, I didn't like it," says the wife and mother of three grown children. At that time, fifty-one women slept in the same dormitory. This lack of privacy startled her, as well as the seemingly curious rules, particularly that of being permitted only one shower a week. She found the spirituality of the place "threatening," especially the radicality of the staff's way of life. She wondered "why would anyone opt to live in poverty when they don't have to?"

Doing laundry is a school of love where you can learn contemplation.

"Jesus himself lived in simplicity," explains Victoria Fausto, an MH staff member since 1988. "As he said, 'foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.'"

In fact, at MH, the staff beg for everything – food, clothing, transportation. Such a life demands "radical dependence on the Father," Fausto says. When pressed for an example, Fausto noted that she has an unusual shoe size, so it is difficult to find shoes by donation that fit her. Recently she realized her current shoes were too worn out for the winter, and she prayed to receive another pair. "They came two days ago," she reports happily.

St. Benedict Acres provides most of the community's food.

The staff's authenticity is evidenced by the fact that people are continually drawn to visit. As Culshaw admits, "I actually had a born-again experience [there]. I encountered Jesus in the Gospels." She was so moved by her stay that she continued to return three and four times a year for the next six years, and notes fondly that it became her "second home."

The duty of the moment

Fausto explains why so many people feel drawn to the MH way of life. By embracing simplicity, she says, one realizes that "what will fulfill is God, not material wealth, not striving for independence, not power, but reliance on the Father like a child." While their particular approach to simplicity is a calling and not for everyone, she admits, the spirit of living simply is a universal call, something towards which every human heart is drawn.

The universal character of MH's spirituality is expressed not only in material simplicity, but in dedicating themselves to what Doherty called "the duty of the moment." As Fausto states, "Everything we do is prayer. We must be continually aware that our work is an offering. Even making the bed becomes a prayer."

Doherty stressed this often. She was emphatic that the humblest of tasks could be expressions of love for Christ. The *Little Mandate*, the expression of MH's spirituality which Doherty believed to have received from God, states, "Do little things exceedingly well for the love of Me."

Culshaw found this aspect of the Mandate one of the most inspiring but challenging elements of her stays at MH. She describes being assigned to the laundry station, where she spent her whole work day ironing, because, in their dedication to simplicity, they did not use dryers. The irons themselves weren't always the most efficient, because they were donated. She struggled with the fact that she was being asked to do something which from her comfortable middle-class life seemed "beneath" her. As she persisted, however, she began to see the need to unite this mundane task with prayer, and saw that "the interior life flows into your actions."

This is what Catherine Doherty called "the constant transformation of the heart" amidst the humble stuff of everyday living.

"Doing laundry is a school of love where you can learn contemplation," she wrote, in a quote applicable to any work, any vocation. "The repetitive work of ironing and folding clothes is conducive to the freedom of the Spirit which allows you to roam at will, now beholding Christ in Nazareth, now meditating on the Eucharist, now thinking about the Scriptures." The beauty of Doherty's vision, as expressed in Madonna House, is that a life of radical simplicity leaves so much more room for union with Christ.

Jenna Craine lives in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia with her husband Patrick and infant son Noah. She is an avid reader, occasional writer, and stay-at-home mother.

Simplicity in science and theology: The elegance of God's creation

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

Simplicity is presented as something to aspire to in the Bible. "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," Jesus said (Matt. 18:3). Children have a simple, but in some ways a very profound, understanding of the world: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." One could do a lot worse for a theological understanding of God and our relation to him. Genesis 1 lays out a simple description of creation; God did it in an orderly manner. The details and method of creation are important, and we need to come to understand them, but the framework within which we do so is simple: it is God's world, and we are his children.

Simplicity is also respected in scientific communities. One thing that scientists appreciate and speak highly of is an elegant, simple theoretical framework. Isaac Newton provided a framework in classical physics that explained a phenomenal amount of data. Albert Einstein advanced our understanding of physics exponentially with his theory of general relativity, making us realize that Newtonian physics is a special case of a much more general theory. In the life sciences, evolutionary theory with its focus on DNA and genetics has provided a simple way to explain a large body of facts. It has provided a elegant and powerful framework for understanding the "how" of God's act of creation.

Complex reality

The relationship between a scientific theory and its supporting data is not always as obvious as people might expect. The real world is often more complicated than the theoretical framework used to understand a natural phenomenon. We know that gravity acts equally on all weights: heavy objects do not fall faster than light objects, a theoretical insight ascribed to Galileo. However, anyone who has watched a feather and a marble fall to the ground knows that the marble will hit the ground first.

We know, of course, that air resistance affects the impact of gravity, and teachers explaining the law of gravity are usually careful to suggest that it should be tested on the moon or in a vacuum to avoid dealing with the resistance caused by air. Galileo's brilliance as a scientist was his ability to recognize the underlying simple principle and ignore the confounding factor that had confused the issue until his time.

In modern science, the same sort of simplification applies: we try to discount the factors that are not central to the theory and that confuse our reading of the data. There are some famous examples of scientists who have (apparently) lied about their data to support their theoretical framework. It is believed that Gregor Mendel fudged his data to fit his genetic framework for heredity. His theory was correct, but his data was deemed simply too good to be true.

Confused by data

Other scientists have complicated what had been a simple theory in order to make it fit some data – data that is later proved to be flawed. Schrödinger had an elegant mathematical formula to understand an aspect of quantum theory. Dirac says that the physicist then made a mistake: he looked at his data, which he found did not fit his theory. In response, Schrödinger changed his theory, making it more cumbersome, to fit the data. Sometime later, another way to look at the data was suggested, and it turned out that his original beautiful theory had been right.

The psychologist who introduced me to psychology at McGill, D. O. Hebb, says that good scientists are able to separate the gold from the dross. This, he argues, requires the world of imagination, and facts sometimes get in the way. I think Hebb was saying that data and facts may be incorrect or open to alternate explanations; we should not always hold theory hostage to the limits of our facts.

In our understanding of God's special revelation, the same principle may apply. When our explanations of biblical themes become too complex, it may be that we have let a specific text confuse us. Think of how our understanding of the Lord's Supper has divided us as a church. Bible scholars speak of interpreting a given text in the light of the whole Scripture. It may be that our confusion and theological divisions result from paying attention to air friction, missing the simple underlying principle that gravity is the same for every object. Perhaps the simple children's request for bread needs to be central.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is associate professor of psychology at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.

'Crave connections'? Try communal living

Stephanie Tombari

HAMILTON, Ontario – I am the classic introvert. On average, it takes about three years for me to be at ease with someone – a new colleague, a new neighbour, whoever – and I never feel rested or sane after a day that includes interacting with people from morning until night. So what I don't get is this: why in the world would anyone intentionally choose to live with people they don't have to?

Welcome to the world of communal living. The voluntary simplicity movement has sparked a revived interest in communal living in recent years, or at least, revived awareness among the average Janes like me. "Voluntary simplicity" is a conscious lifestyle choice that tries to reduce dependency on things that clutter. In a really big nutshell, simple living is way to get back to a simpler pace for any one of many reasons: to tread more lightly on the planet, silence the noise of the modern world, save money, have closer relationships, help the poor, or listen more closely to God.

Intentional communities among Christians have been growing since Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin founded the Catholic Workers' Movement, which spawned a number of communities intent on helping the poor during the war-torn 1930s. Shane Claiborne, one of today's most dynamic young advocates for the poor and against violence, is also founder of the Potter Street Community (aka "The Simple Way"), in Philadelphia, PA. He's a big fan of Dorothy Day – and an even bigger fan of Jesus Christ.

Currently the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) has 126 intentional communities across Canada listed in its online directory, but that number doesn't reflect the hundreds of communities just forming, or those that prefer not to be listed. At the Christian Reformed Church offices in Burlington, Ontario where I work, there are a few people living in intentional communities. They aren't societal hermits, new age hippies, or Amish (yes, I admit it, I would have thought so too); they have real jobs and real lives. I asked Crystle, 32, a colleague of mine from Hamilton, Ontario a few questions.

Kirkendall Cluster Community celebrates their commitment to each other for another year.

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What is an intentional community?

I define an intentional community as a group of people deciding to live in close proximity to each other with a shared goal and purpose. It's different from an eco village (living together to have less impact on the environment) or co-housing (living together in the same building with others) . . . [although] some of the outcomes . . . could look similar.

Why live in one? Why do you?

I feel this is one way in our Western culture to live out my faith in a way that speaks to many of the idols of it. I also crave closer connections to people and the increased accountability it can bring.

Who's in your community?

There are seven adults and one child; four households across three houses. (The age range is 25-60.) Our main purpose is: "Know Christ, Show his Kingdom, Grow his disciples." We've been around for 1½ years, and are still figuring out how to do this. We have two computer programmers, a stay-at-home mom (trained as a nurse), an architect, a social housing worker, a learning coordinator, and an educator. We have morning prayer on Wednesdays, and Friday night potlucks. We also have business meetings and make plans and dream together. We also just bump into each a lot since our houses are right next to each other.

What does 'simple living' mean to you?

Not buying the latest things. Not buying things that won't last. Asking honestly whether I need something before I buy it. Fixing things. Making my own food. Growing my own food. Not doing so many things that I'm too busy to make space for people when they drop in and visit.

See **Intentional** *on page 8.*

Down-to-earth, every-day heroes

Flowers & Thistles

Curt Gesch

I had a hobbit in my English 10 class. Twenty-two "men," no elves, no dwarves, no orcs, but one hobbit. I was tempted to call this hobbit *Sam Gamgee*, but because the other students all called him *Hobbit*, with respect, he became *Hobbit* to me, too. Hobbit was an avid reader, of Tolkien especially, as if he were checking for inaccuracies in the descriptions of his kin. I never taught P.E., so I am not sure about Hobbit's feet – I assume they were well-furred.

Come parent-teacher conference time, it was easy to spot Hobbit's father. He was Hobbit-ish, wearing bib overalls, with a freshly-scrubbed red face, and an air of earth, mushrooms, and vegetables about him. We spent a few minutes discussing his son's schoolwork – excellent all around – and then I gained a few pointers about how to grow melons in cloches and cold-frames. The conference was most satisfactory.

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I saw a tiny melon in my daughter-in-law's garden in Hamilton, Ontario, on Thanksgiving weekend, but the squirrels had got there before me. There was not much gardening to do, so – after morning praise and thanksgiving – my son and I went to work on the house, stripping off old vinyl siding and strapping, in preparation for the installation of foam insulation. In its own way, a hobbitish sort of work.

Glenn Mcleod of Telkwa visits Curt.

Not being very skilled, I spent a few hours extracting bent twist nails from the old strapping, then sorting and stacking the 1" X 3" inch stuff. I figure that by my labours I must have saved my son almost $4.13. Very satisfying work, though, not a glamorous job. I agree with Lionel Basney: "... a culture cannot be judged by its heroes and great works. It must be judged by its ordinary people and ordinary products."

My pay was quite ordinary, too: zilch, zero, *nada*. I was willing to settle for squirrel tenderloin, black or grey pelage acceptable. We'll see if the employer comes through when I'm next in Hamilton.

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This issue of *Christian Courier* has a theme: simple living. I'm not so sure exactly what simple living is, but I think ordinariness, dignity, and integrity of work must have something to do with it.

I'm also quite sure that monetary wealth has little to do with simplicity. John Muir once compared the owner of the Southern Pacific Railroad to himself: "I don't think Mr. Harriman is very rich. He has not as much money as I have. I have all I want, and Mr. Harriman has not." I concur with Muir (although those tenderloins would be appreciated).

I'm also sure that exotic locations – wilderness or urban – have little to do with a simple life. I think the naturalist, Louis Aggasiz, a sophisticated scientist, was right on the mark when he commented that "he had spent the summer traveling, only to get half-way across his back yard."

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In a slightly different context, Elias Chacour – Palestinian Christian activist and peacemaker – tells of the advice he received from one his Christian mentors. "If there is a problem [in lifestyle, environmentally-sensitive decision-making or social justice],... this is what happens. Three people will try to do something concrete to settle the issue. Ten people will give a lecture analyzing what the three are doing. One hundred people will comment or condemn the ten for their lecture. One thousand people will argue about the problem. And *one person* – only one – will involve himself so deeply in the true solution that he is too busy to listen to any of it."

That said, I believe I shall cease, desist, and quit writing and go back to being a pseudo-hobbit. There are still a few rutabagas in the garden. I should make sure the root cellar humidity is right, and then peel some scabby Kennebec potatoes for supper.

Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters* are not my ideal of human beauty, but there is something in them that I admire and with which I identify. We – us potato eaters – are perhaps *lumpenproletariat* to some, but to ourselves we are hobbits.

Simple creatures with some amazing adventures ahead of us.

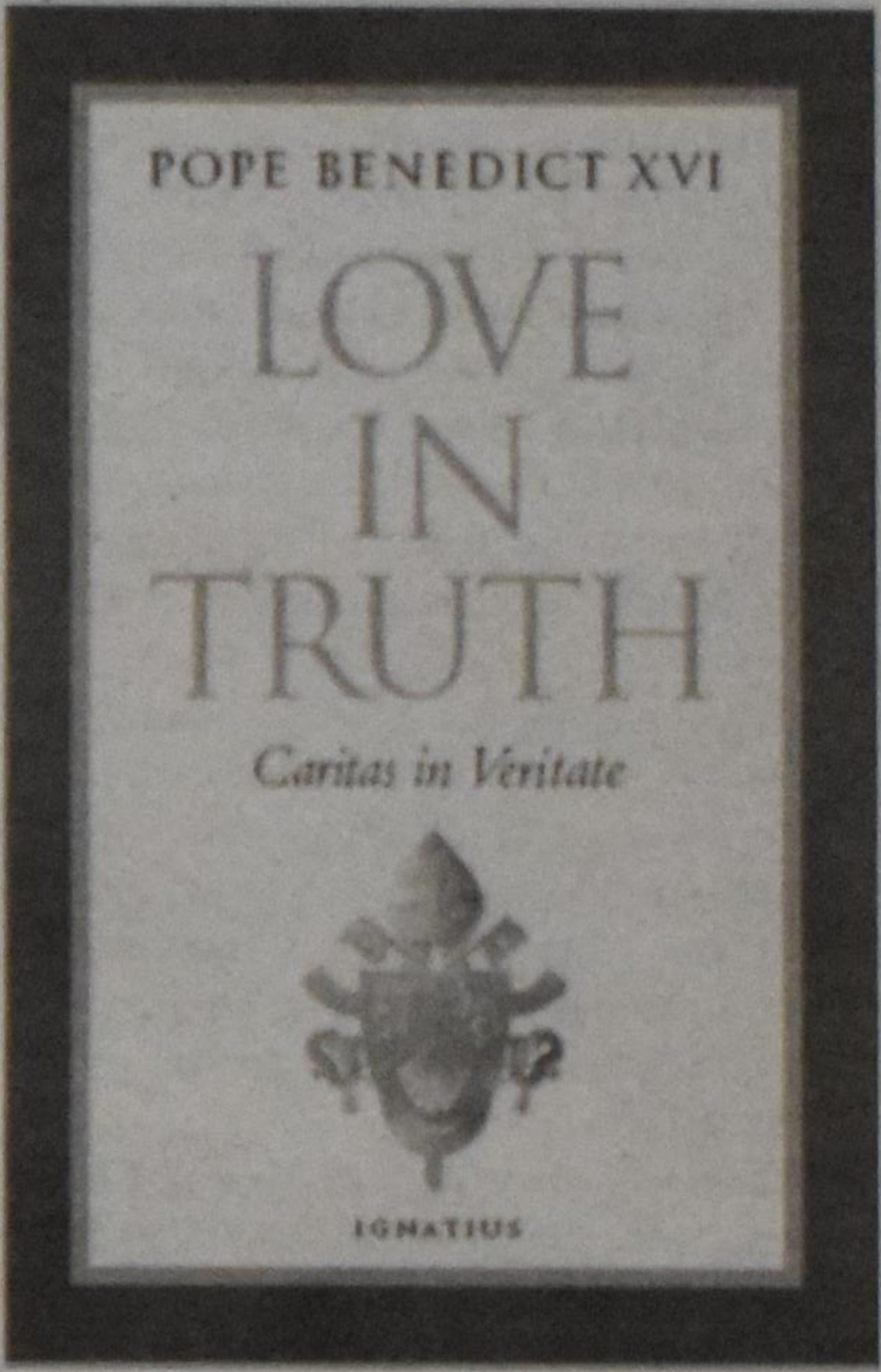
Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) is a retired teacher who has a root cellar, a garden chalet, and a really old house in Quick, B.C.

News

Doing the truth in love

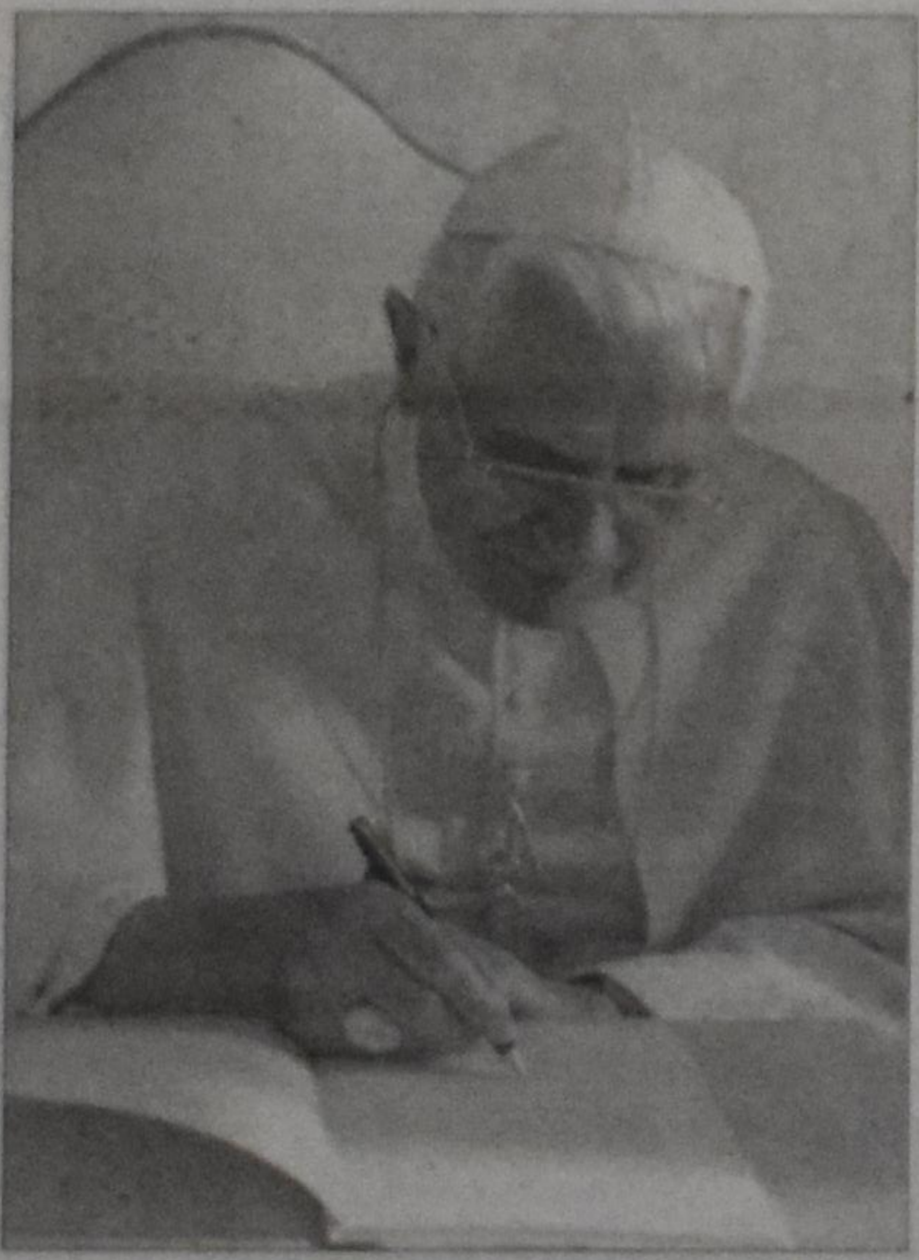
Reflections on the call for evangelical response to Caritas in Veritate

Notes on a global conversation:
Pope Benedict XVI released his first social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, this past June. He addresses the letter to Catholics and to "all people of good will on integral human development in charity and truth." You can read the entire encyclical online at www.vatican.va. Three months later, a group of prominent evangelicals published a statement encouraging all Christians to "read, wrestle with, and respond to *Caritas in Veritate*." This statement, available at www.doingthetruth.org, outlines the Pope's critique of the global economy, and affirms the development of such Christian alternatives: "not to be the 'victims' of globalization, but to be its 'protagonists' – to work for global solidarity, economic justice, and the common good." In this article, Robert Joustra reflects on the encyclical's message and also on reaction to the evangelical statement. Joustra is a signatory of *Doing the Truth in Love*, and was a member of its drafting committee. *– ed. Angela Reitsma Bick*



Robert Joustra

HAMILTON, ONTARIO – If we were to admit which part of our lives lacks discernable Christian engagement, most of us would agree it's how we buy and sell. The web of the global economy seems such an impenetrable labyrinth of relationships – both good and bad – that the lay person can hardly be expected to navigate it. Yet we often feel that we should be doing more, or at least doing better, as Canadians citizens and as Christians in how we think about the emergent geography of the new global economy. Too often, on reading the story of the rich man and Jesus, I am left with no doubt as to whose shoes I am in, and I realize one thing: we need to start taking seriously Jesus' very real warning that few things are harder than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.


Pope Benedict XVI signing the encyclical.

> *We need to start taking seriously Jesus' very real warning that few things are harder than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.*

The problem with a robust engagement of Christian social teaching and the global political economy is that it defies the literature on left and right that already exists. Somewhere in between dismantling capitalism and business as usual exist real policy alternatives that can make tangible improvements to the market system, but the politics of the day seem to fragment and polarize rather than call for the sort of tough-minded compromise that we need here. This, in a nutshell, is the enthusiasm of a group of 68 evangelicals about the Pope's latest encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*.

In *Caritas in Veritate* we find an unapologetic application of the rich tradition of Catholic social thought to global governance. It is *public* theology, because it responds to the questions our neighbours are asking: how should the balance be struck between cultivating wealth, sustainability and the common good? Who should chart that balance and what kinds of institutions do we need to secure it? How can business be moral, and capital be virtuous?

Our excitement is not so much for the *answers* the Pope supplies – though some of us are excited by these – but for the incisive and winsome *way* he responds. Not with apologetic reactionary, as though global markets had not indeed created enormous wealth where there had been none before, but neither triumphalistically, as though no homes had been lost, no environments savaged and no poverty deepened. The Pope responds *out of*, not despite, the Catholic tradition, and by so doing invites Christians to mine deeply our own traditions and the Scriptures that unite us to suggest better ways of balancing charity and truth.

Think, discuss, and be refreshed

The response to our call has been mixed. *First Things*, *Books & Culture*, *Comment* and *The Review for Faith and International Affairs* have all carried it, bringing no shortage of criticism from those who reject the idea that Catholic social doctrine can provide a proper corrective to our (at times) morally ambiguous Protestant market theologies.

But at least a few institutions are taking up the call to begin expanding evangelical thought on international political economy. Cardus (cardus.ca) is teaming up with the MarketPlace Institute at Regent College this spring to provide a forum for thoughtful evangelical responses to *Caritas in Veritate* and ultimately fire a fresh Biblical imagin-ation on how to constellate our politics and our economies at the global scale. Mike Goheen and Erin Glanville have just released a new edited volume by top scholars exploring the religious roots of globalization, fore among them the roots and logic of global capitalism (*The Gospel and Globalization*, Regent Press). And as the encyclical itself makes press and becomes available, there is hope that it might serve as a standard around which Christians may – if not agree – at least admit that such a conversation must be held, and that its time is now long past. We are much in need of refreshed imaginations for thinking about our economic systems, as academics, public policy wonks *and* as every-day Christians.

When the disciples heard Jesus lament about the rich man and the kingdom of heaven they responded in outrage: if the best of us can't make it, who can?

Our hope, as Bob Goudzwaard and Mark Vander Vennen so recently recalled in these pages – is captured in the Gospels, when Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Robert Joustra is a Researcher with Cardus, a doctoral student in international politics at the University Bath and a lecturer in political science at Redeemer University College.

Intentional *continued from page 7.*

What do you think about the current trendiness of 'simple living'?

I think it's always a good thing to think about how much stuff we have and to make use of more with less. I hope that people return to looking for quality products over quantity and enjoy the stuff they do have – and also enjoy the people and food and environment around them.

What does believing in Jesus and the intentional community have to do with one another?

I strongly believe in what Dietrich Bonhoffer says in *Live Together*: that if the community is not Christ's it will fail. Christ calls us into community, he gives it life, he makes it possible to live and love and forgive and grow together. A community based on my goals or expectations will cause problems and it will break down. We constantly need to remind each other and ourselves this, and pray that it will be our reality.

What does that mean to you personally?

I need to remain in Christ first. That allows me to truly be with people in community. I need to check my motivations and my heart when I feel I have been hurt by others. I need his forgiveness and love first and foremost.

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So do I live simply, or do I simply live for me? Well, I 'm currently not planning to live in an intentional community, but we recently sold our home and downsized – voluntarily. I have an older car, but then again, I have a car. I prefer to eat out rather than cook my own food, but I shop the local farmers markets all summer long. Though I'd like to argue that my measured simple life should count for something, it's hard when I'm talking about someone who gave everything for me.

I heard someone say recently that simple living isn't some trend; it's a way of living in community with others. For now, maybe I'll just try having someone new over for dinner.

Stephanie Tombari is a freelance writer, and senior writer at CRWRC.

Almighty anti-terrorism

A vision for Reformed witness to Muslim neighbours

Sarah Brouwer

"God didn't put us on earth to be comfortable; he put us here to take as many people to heaven with us as possible." Mary Van Zam* lives out this vision as she works with Muslim-Background Believers (MBBs) in Africa, and she believes that her mission field has come to us in North America.

Child at a Christian school for children of Muslim Based Believers.

Van Zam is a missionary of 41 years experience. In those decades, her MBB's have been attacked with knives, had limbs chopped off, homes burnt down, and have even been beheaded for their faith. Others have had spouses leave them, or parents who have disinherited them. Many times, powerful Malams have gathered together vast sums of money and sent teams of learned men to debate with and bribe these believers back to the Muslim faith. She constantly sends out prayer updates to Christians around the world to strengthen the shield of prayer around her network.

Van Zam was born and raised Christian Reformed. Her dad was a pastor. Her mom told her stories of missionaries as a little child. At the age of 21, she headed to Africa as a missionary for CRWRC. She began as an English teacher, with students

assigned to her to work in the library. They came to her house for lunch in the middle of the work day. As she said, "I was born CRC, I was taught that man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word from the mouth of God. So I let those students know we'd have Bible reading every meal. They weren't dumb – it meant less time working. In fact, they were so clever about getting out of work, they asked me question after question about those Bible stories." Among those student workers was a Muslim who through these meal-time Bible studies became a follower of Jesus.

Be a blessing to Muslims

Since then, Van Zam has learned many lessons on ministering to Muslims that she feels we need to learn in North America.

I was born CRC, I was taught that man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word from the mouth of God.

"You need to bless the Muslims moving into your community. Just ask them how to bless them – they will tell you."

One family in my small community is trying. They have remodeled their basement and invited Fallah*, a recent immigrant of Muslim faith, to live with them. Her clothes are at the new home, indicating her desire to live with them – however, she is not there. She has been prevented by abusive interrogation and other forms of intimidation. She told the host family that after Ramadan, her family would let her come, but Ramadan has come and gone, and her brother will not let her answer her own cell phone. In the meantime, the home willing to host her has experienced pain. Odd things, such as the toilet, are breaking, and the hostess's knee has buckled, requiring expensive care they suddenly can't afford.

Van Zam, from her years of experience with Muslims, treats these facts in a matter-of-fact fashion and states that, undoubtedly, curses are being leveled against the host family. "We are waging a war," she says, "and we must become anti-terrorists for the sake of the Almighty God. The only true way to neutralize terrorists is to pray for them, and to bless them."

Become an anti-terrorist

As anti-terrorists, we can protect both ourselves and those cursing us. Van Zam has three steps for us to pray. First, pray for a frustration to the cursers' plans. Second, pray that God will bless those who have cursed us with conviction, a new heart and a transformed life.

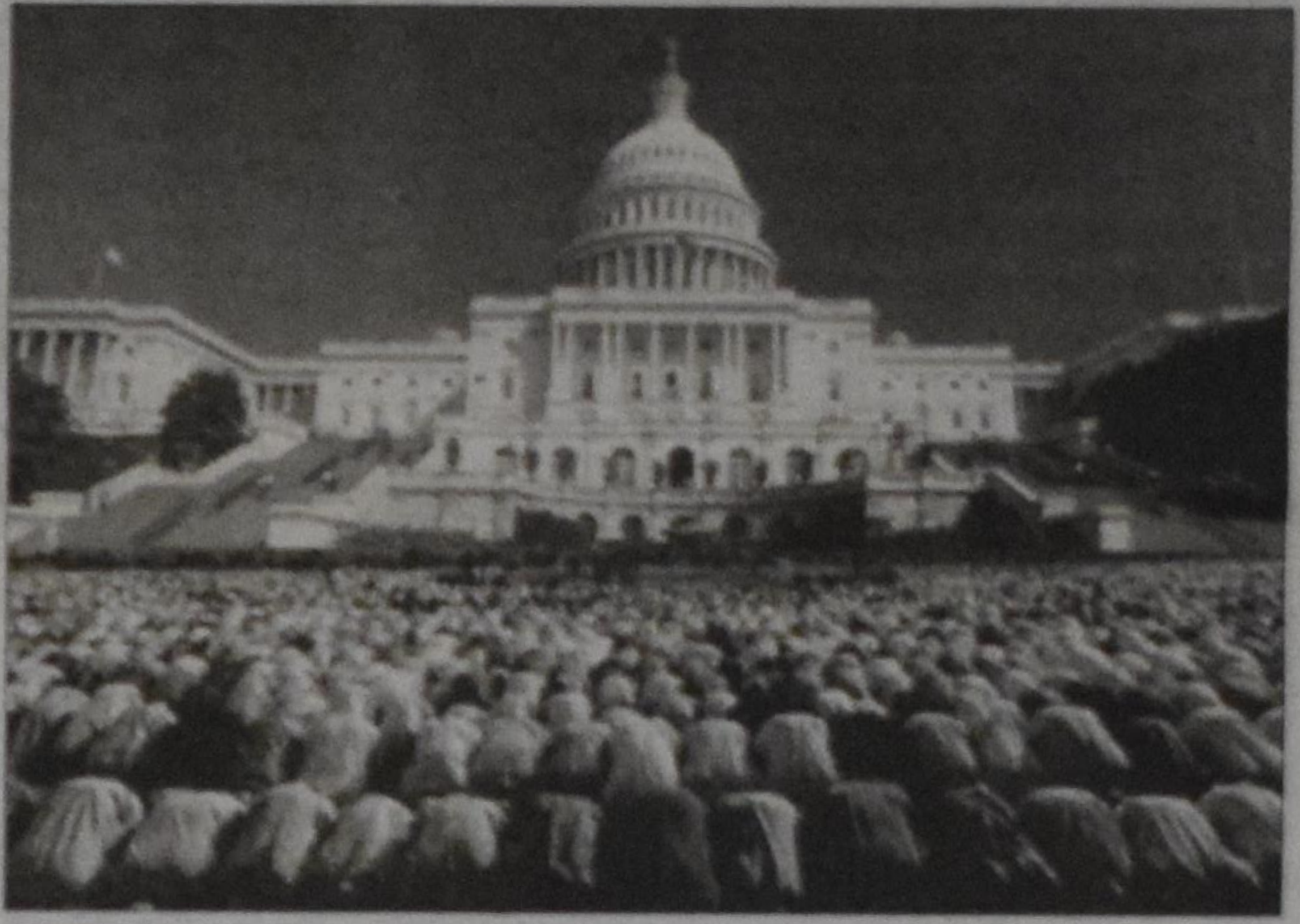
Third, pray that the curse won't reach us, but instead bump into the Glory of God and be swallowed up, so that it doesn't go back and hurt the curser.

Could churches of the reformed faith act as an anti-terrorist organization? Perhaps we'd rather respond like Hezekiah did: "He thought, 'There will be peace and security in my lifetime'" (Isaiah 39:8). His concern for the present seems narrow-minded; where is his concern for Israel's children?

Consider this urgent call to prayer from Shirley Dobson, Chair of the US National Day of Prayer Task Force:

"On the 25th of September, Muslims [called] for a Muslim Day of Payer in Washington, DC (www.islamoncapitalhill.com). They [called] for 50,000 Muslims to gather and pray on the DC Mall. This is the exact word of one of the Sheikhs who is leading this historic gathering: 'Muslims should march on the White House. We are going to the White House so that Islam will be victorious, Allah willing, and the White House will become into a Muslim house.' These are not empty words. They speak of a dark spiritual intent and a coming day of great trouble to America."

Now is the time that many Muslims are asking questions. They want to learn English and figure out how to settle in this country. This is our chance to show them the riches that come from a relationship with God and from an assurance of eternity.



Muslim Day of Prayer on Sept. 25; attendance was estimated to be 7,000 to 9,000.

This will bring each of us out of our comfort zones. We may even end up with some strangely-dressed people in our cozy homes, looking wildly out of place with their head coverings. But maybe, just maybe, that is the point – and we'll be given the honor of taking some of them to heaven with us, where they do belong, strange clothes and all.

Daughter of MBB who died after her left arm was chopped off by terrorists.

**Names have been changed to protect the people involved.*

Sarah Brouwer is chair of the missions team at a CRC in Minnesota.

Biblical parallel

The story of Hezekiah has been on Van Zam's heart lately. It is in the Bible three times, and if God writes anything down three times, then he really wants us to pay attention.

We all know the Sunday school version: Hezekiah gets sick, and laments the unfairness of his illness. He begs for healing, and God agrees to heal him. Hezekiah receives a tremendous sign – the sun shadow moved back ten steps. What Van Zam points out is that the Babylonians were meticulous astronomers at that time. Such an event in the heavenly realm did not go unnoticed. In fact, "envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask [Hezekiah] about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, [and] God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart" (II Chron. 32:31).

Sadly, Hezekiah failed this test miserably, and Van Zam thinks that you and I are making the same mistakes. The Babylonians were curious about the miracle, and the powerful God, but Hezekiah didn't mention his God. Instead, "Hezekiah received the messengers and showed them all that was in his storehouses – the silver, the gold, the spices and the fine oil – his armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them" (II Kings 20:13). Have we done the same thing? Have immigrants from Africa come to America, seen all our treasure, but not seen our God? They watch TV and visit Super Wal-Mart. They are looking at all that is in our storehouses, but are we showing them the God who has blessed this continent?

The price of Hezekiah's failure was severe. He was told that "all the treasure in the storehouses would be carried off to Babylon … and some of your … own flesh and blood will … become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isaiah 39:6,7). What will be the price of our failure?

Church

Punjab: Young 'blasphemer' killed in prison, violence spreads

SIALKOT, India (AsiaNews) – The young Christian man who was accused of blasphemy and arrested on September 12 in a village in Punjab was killed in prison. Police had Fanish, 20, remanded into their custody in order to continue their investigation. Not long later, prison guards in Sialkot district prison found the young man's lifeless body, with visible signs of injuries.

For Nadeem Anthony, member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Fanish's death was judicial murder. Condemning in the strongest terms the latest anti-Christian murder, the activist told AsiaNews that police said the young man committed suicide by hanging himself in jail. That didn't make sense, said Anthony. Instead, "it is a torture killing" because "we can see signs of torture on his body in the picture." The photos reveal injuries unrelated to strangulation by hanging.

Fanish was arrested after accusations of blasphemy were made against him. A day earlier a Muslim mob gathered in front of the church in the village of Jaithikey to teach the local Christian community a "lesson." Extremists damaged the building before setting it on fire. They also pillaged two homes near the church.

A relationship between the 20-year-old Christian man and a young Muslim woman appears to have been the cause of the tragic turn of events. Fanish was accused of provoking the young woman and of throwing away a copy of the Qur'an she had in her hands. Fr. Emmanuel Yousaf Mani, director of the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) of the Catholic Church said, "Muslims cannot stand the idea that a Muslim woman might fall in love with a Christian."

The NCJP expressed "grave concern' over the rising tide of violence against religious minorities, all in the name of the blasphemy law. Urgent government measures are needed, they said. It is increasingly clear that profanations of the Qur'an "are just excuses used to attack non-Muslims, who are increasingly victimized and persecuted by Islamic fundamentalists."

In another incident, a Christian settlement in Ghaziabad was attacked by Muslims, enraged by blasphemy charges against a 40-year-old Christian man called Lawrence. After repeatedly hurling stones and rocks at the man's house, the mob set upon local Christians and tried to storm the local Catholic Church. Only a quick intervention by police prevented bloodshed. However, police arrested Lawrence's nephew, Shahkeel, and Lawrence himself went into hiding.

Violence by Pakistani Islamists is known to be funded by foreign jihadist organizations. The *Arab Herald* recently reported that a Saudi charity gave $15 million dollars (US) to a pro-al-Qaeda militant organization. Sources told *AsiaNews* that the al-Qaeda-linked SSP was involved in the anti-Christian attacks in Gojra where several people were killed. The Al-Haramain Foundation, an organization banned by the UN Security Council for its links to al-Qaeda, reportedly funded those attacks.

DVD series looks at Book of Revelation

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – "God Wins," a new, eight-session DVD packet accompanied by a leader's guide, provides a different picture of the Book of Revelation than the one promoted by the best-selling *Left Behind* series of apocalyptic novels by authors Tim Lahaye and Jerry Jenkins, says Rev. Lew Vender Meer, a pastor who adapted the video series from several sermons he preached on the topic.

Published by Faith Alive Christian Resources, the publishing ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, the video series and leader's guide portrays Revelation as a highly symbolic look at the trials and tribulation humankind has experienced through history, and how Christ, having achieved victory by dying on the cross, will return one day "in majesty and glory."

> *... Revelation is a symbolic record of the testing of the church throughout history ...*

We know "God wins, but the issue is what happens in the process. I take on the *Left Behind* series [which has sold 11 million copies] and look at the book from the perspective of the Reformers," says Vander Meer. Revelation "is kind of a picture book. It's poetry. It's not about some idea that fighting is coming and you'd better be worried about it," says Vander Meer, a long-time high school Bible teacher and pastor of New Community Church, a non-denominational church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

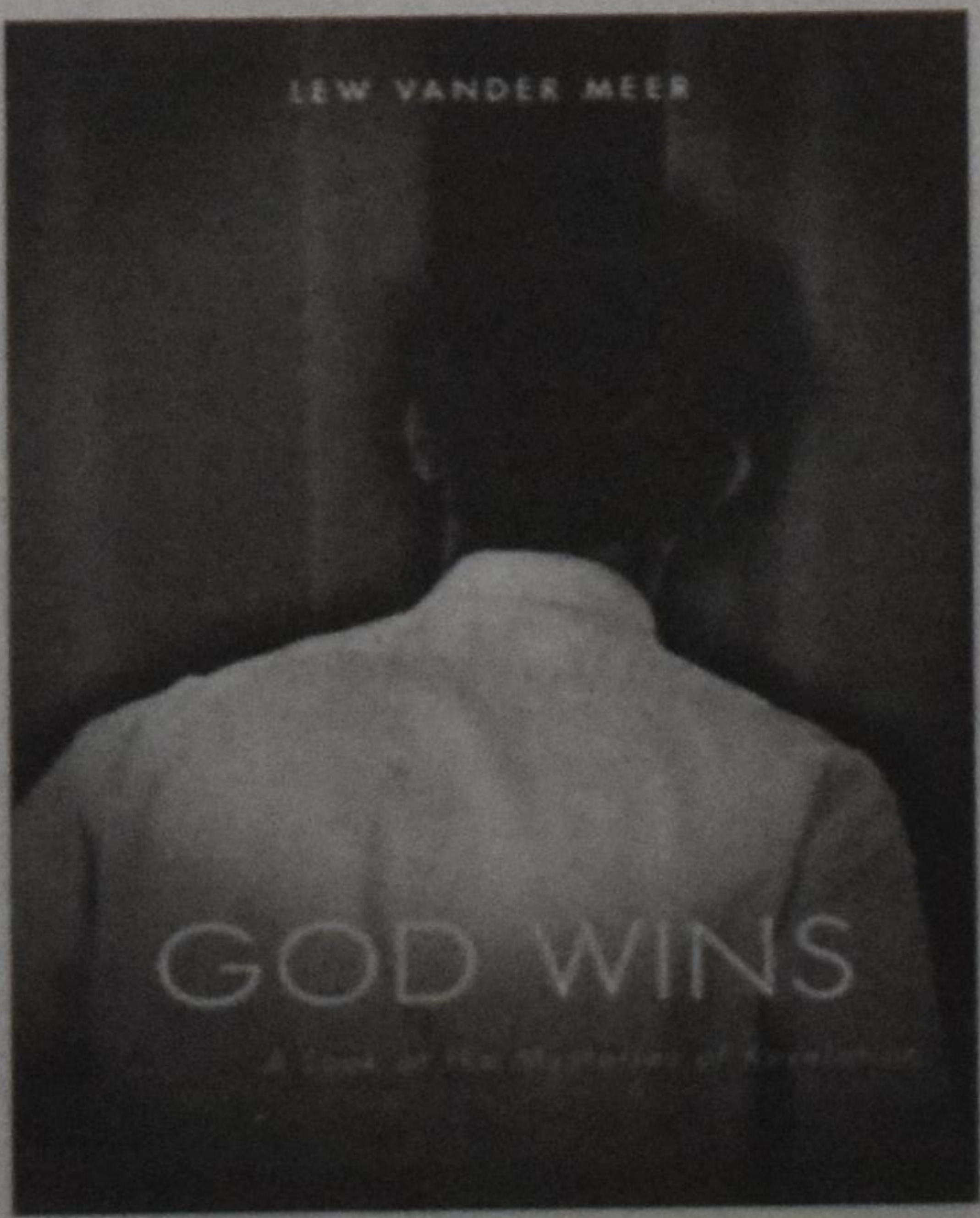
The Reformed approach to the end times is called "amillennial," a view that (contrary to Premillenialism), teaches that there will be no literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth before the final judgment, no Rapture and no seven-year tribulation of intense suffering for those left behind before the Lord returns.

Coming out of the historical context of the persecution of early Christians by Rome, amillenialism is a view that says, "Revelation focuses primarily on the past, but – like any good history lesson – also looks at the present and the future," Vander Meer writes in the leader's guide. "This view says that Revelation is a symbolic record of the testing of the church throughout history, but offers a clear message that the church has been (and will continue to be) victorious."

Vander Meer admits he may not have it all right, and that there are parts of Revelation that he's still grappling with. Making it difficult is the fact that Reformer John Calvin did not write a commentary on this book, as he did on most of the other Bible books.

The difficult thing, Vander Meer says, is interpreting the symbols in the Book of Revelation in light of a serious reading of the Bible. Careful attention needs to be paid to the symbols and what they mean. He also quotes respected Reformed scholars on the subject of suffering and how we might want to look the end times. Calvin Seminary President Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., for instance, wrote, "God's good is often hard for us to understand. In fact, it's sometimes hard to measure... Could it be that the saints are sometimes called to bear a fearful disease with grace so as to encourage those of us who are weak?"

Vander Meer tries to bring the Book of Revelation into a clearer, less overwhelming perspective. "I want to help people see this as a book of encouragement," he says. "My hope and prayer is that this series opens up the Book of Revelation to the church and makes the book more available to people," says Vander Meer, who previously did a video series on the *Belgic Confession* for Faith Alive.



CRWRC awarded $1.4m grant

Beth DeGraaf

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee has been awarded a $1.4 million innovation grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID*) that started September 30, 2009. The five-year project will expand and deepen a child survival and maternal health project in one of the poorest areas of Bangladesh.

"By working through our faith-based partners in northwestern Netrakona District, CRWRC is creating a network of trained community volunteers who collaborate with government health providers and provide person-to-person support for new and expecting mothers and their newborns," says Alan Talens, a public health advisor for CRWRC and the grant's administrator. The result, Talens says, is a successful, sustainable program that makes better health a priority for all family members – and saves lives.

In a previous five-year child survival grant in the same target area, the number of children who died from preventable disease was reduced by 34 percent – to below the national average. Plus, trained birth attendants or skilled health personnel assisted with all but five percent of deliveries by the end of the first project. In comparison, nearly 80 percent of births were unattended in 2004.

CRWRC exceeded the project targets for several initiatives under the previous grant by using a well-established community organizing model. The model puts the ownership of health promotion activities into the hands of community members. CRWRC adapted the model for use by its partners in Bangladesh in the 1980s, and the new grant includes funding to test its effectiveness in reaching the poorest community members.

Through the new $1.4 million grant from USAID, CRWRC will facilitate training for 1,350 additional traditional birth attendants, community health volunteers, and village doctors at LAMB Hospital in Dinajpur. These trained volunteers will then mobilize community members to access health resources and improve health and hygiene practices at home.

Nearly 250,000 Bangladeshi children under five years old die each year – just under half of these children are newborns. CRWRC's innovative model for public health builds on proven methods that increase good health and reduce mortality among the poorest of high-risk mothers and infants.

"This new grant allows us to continue a remarkable program in Bangladesh," Talens says. "Together, we are building sustainable public-private partnerships that mobilize poor families to access quality maternal and newborn health services."

Church

Britain: Christian couple faces trial for criticizing Islam

LIVERPOOL, UK (CI) – The Christian owners of a hotel are now being prosecuted for a crime because they defended their faith and criticized Islam in a debate with a Muslim guest last spring.

Police arrested Ben and Sharon Vogelenzang, who run the Bounty House Hotel in Liverpool, after a Muslim woman complained that she was offended by comments made on March 20. According to newspaper reports, the debate involved discussion of whether Jesus is the Son of God or was just a minor prophet of Islam. Newspapers also report that the debate included comments that Mohammed was a warlord and Muslim dress for women is a form of bondage. However, the facts of the case are disputed.

The Vogelenzangs are now being prosecuted for a "religiously aggravated" public order offence and a criminal trial is set for December 8-9 at Liverpool Magistrates' Court. If convicted, the couple face a maximum fine of £5,000 and a criminal record.

A major client of the couple's hotel has ceased referring guests because of the allegations. This has led to an 80 per cent drop in the hotel's income, leaving the couple in financial difficulty.

The Christian Institute is funding the Vogelenzangs' legal defence. The Institute describes itself as existing for "the furtherance and promotion of the Christian religion in the United Kingdom" and "the advancement of education." Its spokesperson, Mike Judge, says, "We believe there are significant free speech and religious liberty issues at stake."

The couple's lawyer, David Whiting, says, "Ben and Sharon do not accept they were threatening, abusive or insulting. They are committed Christians and it is the defence's contention that they have every right to defend their religious beliefs and explain those beliefs to others who do not hold similar views."

Lawyers have expressed growing concern at the way public order offences are being used to limit free speech in Britain. Neil Addison, a criminal barrister and author of a legal textbook on harassment law, says, "The purpose of the Public Order Act is to prevent disorder, but I'm very concerned that the police are using it merely because someone is offended." He adds, "It should be used where there is violence, 'yobbish' behaviour or gratuitous personal abuse. It should never be used where there has been a personal conversation or debate with views firmly expressed. If someone is in a discussion and they don't like what they are hearing, they can walk away."

'Green' grants available to CRC congregations

(CRCNA) – The Christian Reformed Church's Office of Social Justice (OSJ) is inviting churches to apply for a "Green Congregational Grant." The grant began last year and is intended to occur annually.

The $500 award is given to a CRC congregation in Canada or the U.S. that has demonstrated effective and replicable "greening" in their corner of the church through education, lifestyle and theological initiatives. One congregation in each country will be given a grant. The application deadline is Nov. 1, 2009.

"Has your church made changes to your facilities, worship, and lifestyles in order to care for God's creation?" asks the OSJ. "Whether your changes are large or small, you're eligible to apply."

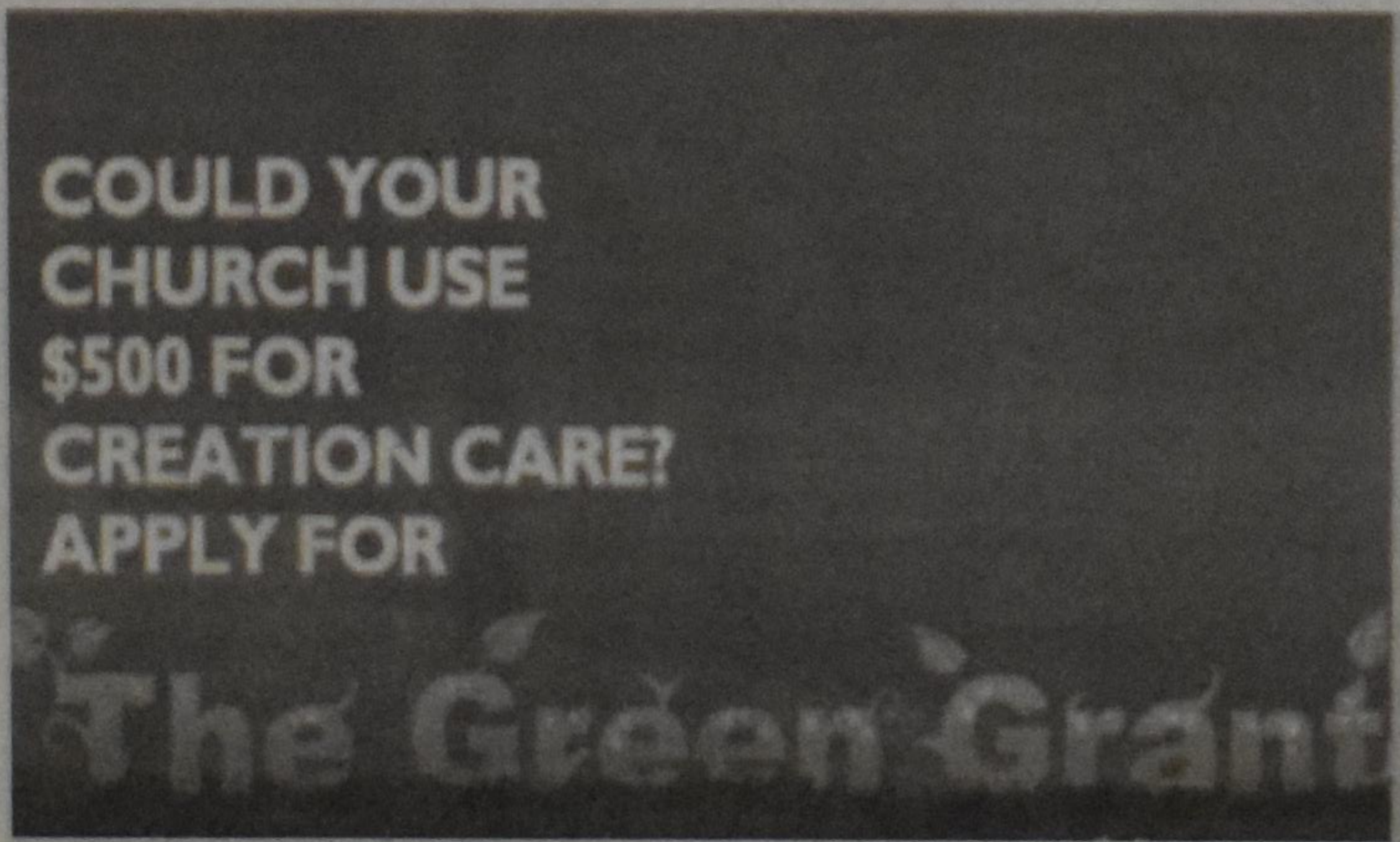
Last year, the OSJ, in conjunction with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), announced that among the numerous entries it received, Houston CRC in Houston, B.C., was the Canadian winner and Covenant CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa, was the American winner. Both churches' projects won because of their ability to be replicated, their environmental impact, their potential for congregational and community transformation, and their creativity.

Houston CRC planted a garden in which single parents, refugees, and other families in need could grow healthy produce for their families. Covenant in Sioux Center submitted a curriculum for a four-day Creation Care Day Camp that occurred this past summer. It focused on composting, deciduous tree and insect life cycles and organic gardening.

Many excellent ideas

Grant evaluators found many worthy efforts among the grant submissions, and in fact added two second-place U.S. grants of $200 each to a congregation in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Lynden, Washington, respectively. (The CRCNA is made up of roughly three-quarters American congregations and one-quarter Canadian.)

Grant winners must agree to share their ideas in order to encourage environmentally responsible behavior in other congregations. To learn more about the grant visit the OSJ webpage at *www.crcna.org/pages/justice/cfm*.



Congregations will be considered for the 2009 grant based on the following:

–the ability for other churches to learn from and replicate the idea presented;

–the impact made on environmental sustainability; and,

–the impact made on community and congregational transformation.

Russian Orthodox leader rues liberal Protestantism

VOLOKOLAMSK, Russia (Interfax) – Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, the leading Russian Orthodox ecumenical official, celebrated what the Orthodox call "the Divine Liturgy" in the catacombs. At the same time he expressed dismay over divisions among Christians. His lament included sorrow over the mainline Protestant abandonment of fundamental principles. "We should clearly understand that division is sin, tearing apart body of Church and weakening the power of Christian witness in secular world," he said.

In saying that, Archbishop Hilarion was returning to a theme he emphasized in an earlier meeting with Pope Benedict. At that time he noted the similarity between Roman Catholic and Orthodox teaching on marriage and family life, as opposed to "Protestant communities which had pursued the liberalization of the Christian teaching."

Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk

Features

Not-so-simple simple living

Heidi Kerssies

Simple living. I love that concept. And yet, as I ponder it, I'm beginning to see that simple living is anything but simple, especially if we equate simple with easy, not difficult, uncomplicated.

For me, simple living means that my lifestyle does not harm or hinder other people or the earth, and that hopefully, others are encouraged and enabled to flourish and thrive. That means I try to buy local, organic food. I try to grow some of my food myself. It means I bike or walk as much as possible. It means that I pay a fair price for products whenever I can. It is not always simple.

This summer I canned tomatoes that I bought from a farm close to my home. Canning tomatoes, in my estimation, is not simple. It is not easy or uncomplicated. Simple would be to buy tomatoes from the grocery store for 97 cents, not to spend four hours around boiling pots of water!

Two stories

So maybe we need to change our understanding of simple. Let me give you an example. I'm going to tell you 2 stories about cashews.

Story #1:

I went to the grocery store last week looking for some nuts. I found a can of roasted cashews. It looked good, and I love cashews. I brought it to the cash, paid for it, took it home and ate cashews for the rest of the week.

Simple, eh?

Story #2:

About 5 years ago I was living in Southern Honduras. I'd been there for a couple of years. One weekend we went to visit the village of El Naranjo. I'd been there a number of times before and had made friends with a girl named Esmelda. In El Naranjo there is no electricity or running water. When we went there we would sleep in hammocks at the pastor's house.

Esmelda had collected a bunch of cashew nuts in anticipation of my visit. Cashew nuts grow on a tree. There is a fruit that grows with them, and the nut hangs under the fruit. The fruit is yellow and juicy and delicious. And, it stains your clothes badly if it spills on you. This I know by experience! Esmelda had saved up a great pile of nuts, probably collected by the children who were always close by. We took the nuts to someone's house and spread them out on a large metal pan. We put them over the fire to roast. Apparently the nuts give off flammable oil, for soon the whole pan of nuts was on fire! Depending on which expert there you listened to, this may or may not have been part of the process.

After the nuts cooled, we took them back to the pastor's house where we proceeded to shell them – no small task. I sat outside the house with the pastor's grown son, and we banged the blackened shells with rocks and tried to get out the nuts undamaged. As we did we talked about a myriad of things:

God, Honduras, immigrating illegally to the US, work.... As evening fell, lamps were lit, guitars were strummed, laughter and conversation floated around. We continued shelling. Most of my nuts came out crushed and broken. Our hands were stained black from the nuts. Later we passed the nuts around, laughing at how small and crushed they were, saying we would never get a job at the cashew factory in the village close by. However, they were oh, so delicious – probably the best cashew nuts I have ever eaten (and I have eaten a lot!) We slept that night, about 20 people in and around a tiny house. Dogs, pigs, ducks, and chickens also slept nearby.

Not so simple, eh?

Behind the scenes

Let's look again. In the first story I bought and ate. But someone picked the nuts, someone roasted them, someone's hands were stained black to shell them. Many hands were part of the process, hands that most likely are exploited and harmed, hands that do not receive a fair price, hands that are entangled and perhaps snared in a complicated net of trade and consumption and oppression. The relationship between us is not simple. It is not easy or uncomplicated.

In the second story Esmelda and the children gathered the nuts, the man up the hill built the fire to roast them, the pastor's son and I shelled them, 20 or so people ate them while hanging out in hammocks. Many hands were also a part of the process. But they were hands that I knew, hands that I have held, hands that I have prayed with and laughed with and cried with, hands that were open to give and to receive. The relationship between us is simple. We care for each other. We like each other and enjoy hanging out together. It is easy and uncomplicated.

Elizabeth Seaton said that we ought to "live simply that others might simply live." It is not easy. It takes time and energy. It takes intention and planning. But perhaps it is the best way. It is the way of community and care. It is recognizing that we are connected in many complicated and possibly wonderful ways. It is the way of giving and receiving, of living a life of joy and abundance. It is how we love God and our neighbour, plain and simple.

Heidi Kerssies (hrkerssies@yahoo.ca)is an elementary school teacher/principal who is a beginning gardener and she harvested lots of basil and thirty snow peas this season.

A gift from Mecca

Aria Sawyer

The vegetable garden rich in tomatoes and flowering basil lay on our right as we entered the walled-in courtyard through the gate. Ali was tending his tomato plants. Amazing what could grow in this desert, with a little care. He invited us to sit down under a bamboo-roofed terrace, which was like a porch standing all on its own with three sides open and only a back bamboo wall and roof. A girl came to serve us water and coffee, which was poured into tiny handleless cups not unlike egg-cups. She poured these little cups half-full: too full according to Ali. There should only have been a few small sips of coffee in each cup. Of course, the refills were abundant.... A vague taste of cardamom with the coffee was no surprise, either. What did surprise me, however, was the colour of the coffee: it was nearly white! (No wonder I couldn't find the coffee beans at the market.)

A feast

After water and coffee ("if you don't want a refill: wiggle your cup ever so slightly") we were invited into the house which stood across from the garden. As we had arrived during prayer time, Ali's wife was still in the prayer room. Ali led us through a very wide marble hallway opening on the left to the family living area and open dining room, which was not small since they lived there with their married children. Blooming basil scented the air.

In a smaller dining room, but still large, the table was all set with glasses of water and plates of salad for everyone. The salad, besides being very tasty, was both organic and "green" (no trucking mileage here: everything came out of the garden). There were several huge oval platters, close to three feet in length, heaped with different types of herbed rice on the table. One had huge pieces of mutton on top of the rice, another roasted chicken (Ali keeps a few sheep and chickens behind his bamboo hut). And a third platter carried a huge hamour fish and some other smaller fish. One of Ali's sons had been fishing early that morning. The youngest son, in his last year of high school, also joined us at the table.

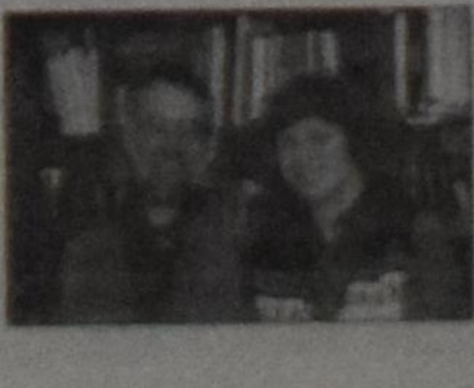
Ali asked a blessing for the food. The rice was herbed to go with the different kinds of meat. It was all so delicious. Another surprise awaited us, not in the form of food, however, for although these Arabs now lived in a beautiful home such as I had never seen before, they still kept to their old traditions. One of these was eating with their hands. They did not expect this from us as we had been given flatware to use. To be honest, I don't know how I ever would have gotten that rice into my mouth by hand. I still have a lot to learn. Arab hospitality is enormous and we were constantly encouraged to eat more. Really? No More? How about a date? (The fruit, that is.) By accepting a date you signalled that for you, at least, the meal was over. No more chicken, mutton, fish, or delicious rice would be offered to you again during this meal.

A parting gift

As at the beginning of the meal, we also washed our hands at the end of the meal. We went into the enormous living room where a table was laden with all kinds of delicacies of dried fruits, nuts and seeds, and chocolate. This, Ali's wife Mirjam explained, was for the poor neighbourhood kids who were foreigners. As Ali explained: "they don't control their kids". I was rather surprised since they were so well behaved. Then I realized he meant that they don't use birth control. So those families had eight or nine kids. Ali and Mirjam's hospitality reached well beyond their own circles. We were foreigners who didn't even speak their language. And these foreign kids were of a different race and religion, and there were lots of them.

We sat on some of the numerous chesterfields and were offered coffee. And yes, his wife did fill the cups even less than half-full, but she stood by ready to fill them again with hot white coffee. In the meantime we talked about our activities in orphanages. I talked about the children's homes in which I am involved in our part of the world. Mirjam had recently been to check on some homes she had earlier helped set up and financed in Africa and Afghanistan as part of her own business. At the end she came with a large crystal bottle of perfume and asked us to allow her to put some on us.

After that, the men left for a funeral (women do not attend funerals in that culture, but visit the family of the deceased during that week). We women, including the daughters-in-law, visited until the men returned, and then we prepared to leave. As we were leaving there was another surprise: Mirjam gave me a bracelet from Mecca, from whence she had returned that same week. What a gift at the end of a most interesting visit and a delicious meal!



Aria Sawyer lives in Sárospatak, Hungary with her husband, Frank.

Doing enough / Doing too much

Ellen Vanderwerf

Last month I happened upon a blog (http://zerocurrency.blogspot.com) which made me scoff at all the choices I have made over the years to keep our family life as simple as I possibly can. I thought I had been doing pretty well, emphasizing simple pleasures instead of expensive entertainment, shopping for 90 percent of our clothes at thrift stores, keeping our household down to using only one car for the six of us for these last 22 years, arranging Christmas to be less about presents and more about showing love and acceptance to each other, making my own bread, cooking from scratch, sewing cloth diapers to re-use, hanging my clothes out on the clothes line instead of the dryer ... oh, I thought I had done so well! But then I read about the drastic choices Daniel Suelo made when he was in his late 30s at the turn of the century (2000 AD) and I knew I could never be any sort of expert on simple living.

Zero?

You see, I thought it was enough to creatively raise a family on one income, but this thoughtful, college educated mountain man has topped me by making it these past nine years on zero income.

I thought I was smart, learning to make our food from scratch whenever possible. I used cookbooks like the *More with Less Cookbook* and *Feed Your Family on $50 a Week or Less* and *Living More with Less* and *The Tightwad Gazette*; he outdid me again by scavenging for food in the woods, only occasionally being fed by friends who live in the nearby town of Moab, Utah.

I thought that it was an ingenious idea when my husband Walt and I took our family camping together for a couple weeks most summers. I believed that roughing it in the woods was a great simple vacation: we'd live in tents, make up stories to tell each other, read used books, play games, cook over an open fire and have fun together living with next to nothing. It always made our home feel like a palace when we returned back to it. But the mountain man outdid us again. He lives in a cave which he shares with mice and insects who also claim their shelter in it. He probably doesn't even own a tent.

Now that my children are practically grown, I see that I have failed them miserably. What I had thought was a lifetime of teaching them to be happily content with what they have, making creative use of other people's cast-off's, finding joy in ordinary pleasures like a tree or a bird ... well, I now realize my efforts were futile! I never went far enough. Oh, to get a chance to start again and do it all over with what I know now. We should have lived in a cave, scavenged for food and shopped for our clothes at the dump instead of the thrift store, and then I might have been in a position to offer expert opinions on simple living.

No, just kidding, cave life is not for me.

What matters?

Simple living is about so much more than merely being the best at living with the least. It is a state of mind. Simple living is keeping complications out of your life so that there is room to think, room to pray, room to remember who you are. Often high-energy people can manage more complications in their lives than low-energy people can, but everyone needs peace and space. We aren't all called to have, or to do, or to be the same as each other. A person with a heart for simplicity will take the time to determine what it is that matters most in this life and hold on to that with all they have.

What matters most to me in this world, after intimacy with my creator, is spending time with the five people I know best in the world. I want to know them, watch them as they learn about life and grow. I want us to stay in a loving relationship with each other. Therefore all my choices for simplicity honour this yearning I have. I've tried to work at various jobs, but I always felt horrible until I was back at home doing what my heart longed to do: I love to be the one who gets to take care of my family. In this way our family was spared the complications associated with two working parents; it just wasn't for me. For some women, life at home might be boring, and they might feel most fulfilled at work, but for me it was the opposite: I hate to be away from home and family.

Other kinds of simplicity

Implementing healthy boundaries in your life leads to an emotionally simple life. A few years ago, when my husband was home, sick, for a year or two, our family reacted by pulling together and blocking off the world from getting in among us. We were all frightened about what was happening, and we felt we were safest together. When I remember this, I visualize the covered wagons in the westbound trains of settlers in the 1800s. At night they would pull their wagons into a tight circle around the fire, thus keeping all menace and threats out of their safe circle. Over time, certain careful people were permitted to come into our protective circle, and we were blessed by them. That was simplicity, and in that time of enforced loneliness we learned lessons about how wonderfully present God is in all circumstances.

I need my social life to be simple. I don't have the mental energy for hundreds of friends. I categorize people into groups of safe people and unsafe people. I try to be careful and cautious around the unsafe people, and I am a little more relaxed with the safe people. There are lots of people I like to talk, play and have fun with – I am not lonely ... yet over my life, with all the moves I have known, there are only about six or seven friends with whom I have ever felt safe enough to talk about everything on my mind, including my doubts. That is the kind of friend I treasure, so I simplify and hold them as my standard of deep friendship.

Church-goers often feel a great deal of pressure to volunteer for God at their church. This is a good thing; it is healthy to share your time and energy with your church community. But here again it is far too easy to give in to all the requests people have of you. You might feel you are doing the right thing by wearing yourself out for the Lord, but in truth, God only wants a relationship with you, not a slave.

"Further up and deeper in," C.S. Lewis invites us in his classic novel, *The Last Battle*. There is always this quest for greater depth in our walk with God. Unfortunately, many Christians get distracted by the "doing for" and they forget the "being with" aspect of faith. Simplicity is striving for what counts, not settling for what only looks like it counts.

Ellen Vanderwerf (wejdes@gmail.com) lives life as simply as she can with her family in Duncan, BC.

Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials.

~Lin Yutang

What is simple living?

Simple living – aka voluntary simplicity – has just about as many definitions as there are individuals who practice it. Simple living is not about living in poverty or self-inflicted deprivation. Rather, it is about living an examined life – one in which you have determined what is important, or "enough," for you, discarding the rest.

–from www.simpleliving.net

A *blog* about simplicity?

I've been asked to house-sit in months to come, so I'm hoping I can eventually read them all [reader's emails] *& do more writing then. But being at a computer all the time is not my idea of healthy. Life is about loving our neighbors, & our gadgets have tempted us into loving everybody but our neighbors, isolating us from society. It's a strange irony to be going out into the cyber-world to say this. It doesn't do much good to preach to the choir, to talk about techno-isolation with my houseless friends outside this library. Yes, it's tempting for me to get sucked into cyber-isolation even as I write this.*

– from zerocurrency.blogspot.com

The "Zen Habits" website (http://zenhabits.net/2007/09/simple-living-manifesto-72-ideas-to-simplify-your-life/) provides a Simple Living Manifesto of 72 steps to simplifying your life.

72 steps to simplicity sound like an oxymoron? Try their "Short List" approach:

1. Identify what's most imortant to you.

2. Eliminate everything else.

Corinthians

Earthly and Heavenly

The first man was of the dust of the earth,
the second man from heaven.
I Cor. 15:46

The first man is taken from the earth, made of dust. It is as if the apostle cannot emphasize this enough. Every time he returns to it.

There will always be those profound and philosophical people who'd like to begin with the spiritual. They think that this is first and foremost and maybe even the only thing. That physical stuff, you can't deny it's there, but it is actually a lower, maybe even an evil form. This is typical of human nature, this desire to put the spiritual on a higher level.

In a way, the materialist is the opposite. Matter is the only thing that is really there. He is happy to acknowledge that the material world is all there is and thinks *it is only matter*, thereby also relegating matter to a rather low level. That matter could be holy he cannot acknowledge, because then he would not be a materialist any longer. It would be tantamount to acknowledging that *in matter* there is something beyond material-ness; there is holiness as well.

Descended from dust

Paul puts himself squarely against both the spiritualist and the materialist. He says that the earthly, the physical, the corporeal is really first. We are dealing here with the foundation of things. We are called to live in the image of the first man.

He is fully from the earth. He is a handful of dust, by God swept up from the street. He is a hunk of clay cut out of the earth. He is dust, and to dust he will return. That realization is palpable throughout the Bible. To think that a person is a mammal and is descended from the apes is a much more highfalutin' thing. The Bible says that it's much worse. A person is descended from grossness, from dirt. You can boil down people into their chemical components.

This is serious stuff – and then to think that it comes first! We have no better foundation than that.

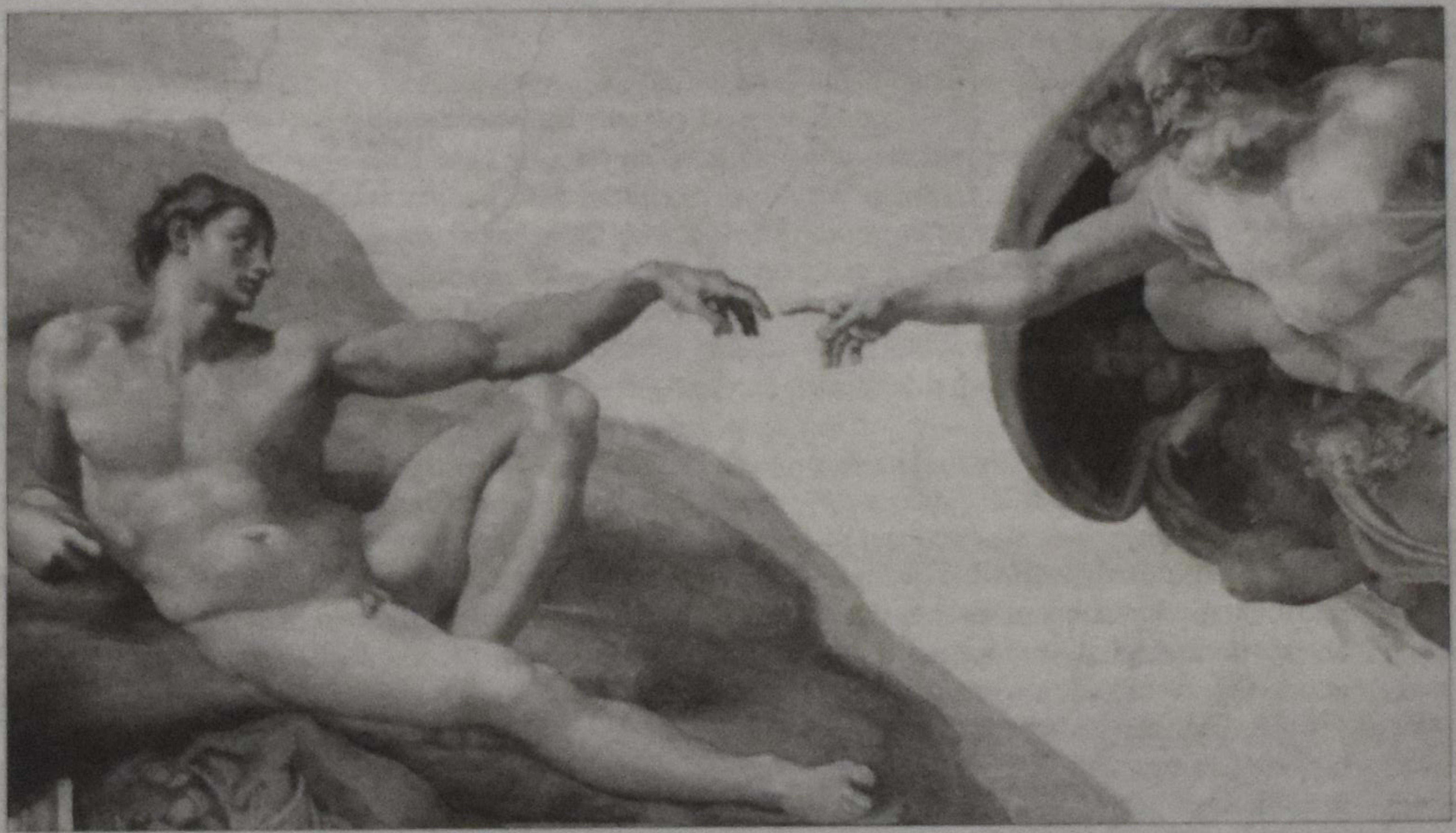
Does matter matter?

However, our matter is God's work. We are fully and physically creatures, like all the rest of the visible creation.

Being a creature means having been imagined, been thought and called into being by God. That is the dimension of holiness in matter.

We are not *just* matter; we are not *simply* matter. We are matter. That's the way we are creatures, and that's the way we are called to be creatures before the face of God and according to his will. God wants us to be physical creatures in a certain fashion. And that creatureliness is found in really everything. So everything that is, is holy.

Yet there is not only the created reality that we are ourselves. The apostle knows about another reality. It is the reality of Christ. He has experienced that in actual human history. There is the person of Jesus. There is his resurrection from the dead. There is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. There is the tradition of the Church where Christ's life is being re-lived and where the gospel of salvation is being passed on. He is the second Adam; he is from heaven.



Michelangelo Buonarroti Creation of Adam

First and second

What does the apostle mean by this? Does he mean that only now the actual, the higher has arrived? Is he speaking about a relation between higher and lower, a hierarchy? Is it not rather true that he takes both ideas and puts them *beside* each other? We have the image of the first Adam, and we are permitted to have the image of the second one as well. There is hardly a suggestion of rank, but clearly one of chronological order. There first was, made by God, one man. After that, also made by God, the second one. And we people move from the one to the other.

In other words, there is no suggestion of devaluation, as if the second one replaces and improves upon the first. But perhaps there is still a suggestion of the second one not being of the earth at all? Does Paul mean that Christ was *not* of Mary, *not* of David and Abraham, *not* of the people of Israel and *not* of Adam? In other words, that he is purely from heaven and has come to replace the earthly Adam?

That's a crazy idea. And yet this is an idea cherished by many. Those people only want to hear about the heavenly, the spiritual and eternal Christ. There's no way the apostle meant to say this. The heavenly man has entered into the earthly one. The eternal Christ is also the historic one.

That is even the core of the apostolic gospel. That gospel is about a historical fact, a reality, a new deed of God in our physical world. That is, as well, the core of our redemption: the second Adam, the one from heaven, has assumed the first, the one from the earth.

Creation's destiny

But then still, what does the apostle really mean? He does, after all, make a distinction between the second and the first, and he emphasizes that the first is from the earth and the second from heaven.

It seems to me that we may not interpret his words as to mean that there are two worlds, an earthly one and a heavenly one and that, therefore, there are two kinds of beings, earthly and heavenly ones, and that Christ is one of the heavenly beings. That kind of thinking would force one to conclude that Christ is a creature as well, albeit a heavenly one. Paul would not think that kind of thing.

Rather, we must think of it as a Jewish metaphor, where 'heaven' often means God himself. When Paul says, therefore, that the second man is from heaven, he is saying to us that *this second man is not created by God, but is God himself!*

That is not only the core of the apostolic gospel; it is also the *power* of it. To think that a piece of heaven has descended to earth smells of Greek mythology, but to think that the Creator himself has *become a creature!* Now, that is gospel. One can accept or reject it, but it is as big a mystery as creation itself.

If we accept that, we participate with all of creation in a glorious perspective. For why did God himself come down? Isn't it so that, as we share the image of the first man, so we would share the image of the second?

In communion with Christ we are delivered from sin and death. Not only that. The creation is not just redeemed and fixed; it is also brought to its ultimate destiny. It will share in the full glory of the Creator himself. That is the reality of the resurrection and of the spiritual body.

This detail shows Michelangelo's Creation of Eve within the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican

We are still anticipating this, largely speaking. That is our hope for the future, and that hope has been raised up by the gospel. In Christ and his resurrection we have been given the guarantee that this is indeed creation's destiny. And in our communion with him we already participate in this.

Translated from the Dutch by Bram Hoff of St. Catharines, Ontario

Community

The Green Oaks Ladies' Club

Roxanne Van Farowe

I am an expatriate, a Canadian who lived in Grand Rapids, Michigan for over a decade. My husband, four children and I had some close friends there and a neighbourhood where we could walk to church and walk to visit some of our friends. Still we had a desire for deeper community.

Then, last fall, when our young family moved to North Carolina, the search for a community, a place to belong, began all over again.

Something happened, however, that helped me to belong here. Shortly after we moved onto Green Oak Drive, I got an invitation to join the Green Oak Ladies' Club, which has been meeting on our street since the early 1970s.

Mrs. Edna's cookie exchange

In December I attended my first meeting, a Christmas cookie exchange at Mrs. Edna's house. Mrs. Edna and her husband Jim live across the street from us, and although in her mid-80s, she is one of the club's liveliest members.

We all brought 40 homemade cookies, set them on the table, and after a good long group chat in the living room, headed to the dining room where the traditional cookie exchange is held. Each carrying an empty container, we shuffled around Mrs. Edna's dining room table, singing the most obnoxious Christmas carols and selecting one cookie from each batch until all the cookies were gone.

The club meets once a month, in the evenings. We laugh a lot, exchange news, admire each other's home décor, and fill each other in on any criminal activity. Some of the women have been in the club since it began in the early 1970s. The three other women who are close to my age seem among the most enthusiastic. About half the group are single women, and it seems every time another house is sold, another single woman moves in. There are no stay-at-home moms – except me – and no one else homeschools (though Mrs. Susan has some homeschooled grandchildren.)

A rich history

Back in the 1970s, I've been told, the Green Oak Ladies met for tea in the afternoon. Their young children played together, the older children were in school, and their husbands were all at work while they traded news and jokes.

Our house was built in 1962, and the earliest homes on the street were built in 1960. The street was filled with young couples and families just starting out. The next street over, Autumn Drive, had an active neighbourhood association. The nearby Brogden Hills subdivision met for parties, parades, and even elected a neighbourhood mayor, I am told.

Fast forward to 2009. The women on our street either work full time or are retired. About half of them are divorced. They have come to Green Oak Drive from Maine, New Hampshire, California, and Colorado, among other places. My children and I wander the neighbourhood daily, but there are no other children to play with, and no moms to chat with.

Finding community

The Green Oak Ladies club is a once-a-month diversion, a wonderful (and, these days, unusual) way to meet neighbours, but is not a community the rest of the month. So where did we find community?

After church-shopping for months, we have finally found two churches to call home (homes?) – a church across town that we are helping to plant and a local church that has been most welcoming. But even at churches, few people seem to have time for new friends. I have connected with local homeschool groups and have found several women who, like me, have four small children and teach them at home. One even lives within walking distance. Better yet, an elderly neighbour has adopted my kids as her grandchildren, and we have all been duly spoiled.

Slowly we are finding friends here and there, and as the peace that comes from having friends settles, it seems to matter less that we don't have one community where we belong.

Where is the simplicity?

In 2009, a person, a woman, must work to build her community. To do this, she usually requires a car, a computer, and a cell phone – no simplicity there. Patience and humour will also help.

In 2009, my new friends are from Lousiana, California, Great Britain, and Alaska. There is even a Canadian at one of our churches, I am told, though I haven't discussed this with her yet.

In 2009, we have shattered the stability of the past, and we belong nowhere … or anywhere. So with Facebook, listservs, and meetup.com we reach out to find the people who are like us so that we can belong to them.

As for the Green Oak Ladies' Club – it is still alive, and will survive as long as someone runs it, I suppose. But will anyone care enough to keep the club functioning when the current secretary leaves the neighbourhood? •

And what I'm wondering is can a neighbourhood – or a church – ever be enough of a community to make our lives simple again?

Roxanne Van Farowe lives without a cell phone but with a laptop computer, a car, a moped, her husband Jim, and their four children in Durham, North Carolina. She homeschools and hopes to write more as her children move out of babyhood.

From Toddlers to Teens

by Denise Dykstra

Family time trumps extra-curricular activity

Two of our kids play on sports teams. One of my nephews belongs to a bowling league. A couple of our neighbours take piano lessons. All of these activities are extracurricular activities – as are ballet, gymnastics, cheerleading, taekwondo, karate, guitar, violin, drums, basketball, tennis, badminton, ice hockey, ball hockey, football, rugby, and … well, you get the picture.

There are loads of after-school events kids can be involved in today, and many reasons for kids to participate. Extracurricular activities help children and teenagers explore their physical, creative, and social potential. They encourage teamwork and leadership skills, responsibility and discipline. They boost self-esteem, teach multitasking, and provide a source of stress relief. They're beneficial; there's no doubt about it. But at what cost? Whatever happened to the idea that less is more?

Close relationships count

Today's habit of over-scheduling kids comes at the expense of the family. Instead of enrolling our kids in everything they've ever had an interest in, we should be working to simplify our lives.

The basic foundation of healthy child and youth development is close family relationships. When we structure all the free time our children have, the thing we most often lose is the thing that builds those relationships: family time. This has a negative impact on our kids. Family time is necessary because it provides children with feelings of love, support, security and safety, and it allows parents to stay connected to their children. Family time also gives parents the opportunity to pass their values on to their kids. In Deuteronomy 6:4-7, God instructs us to make sure our kids learn his commands for Christian living, not the rules of soccer and rugby and the chords of a guitar.

Setting limits

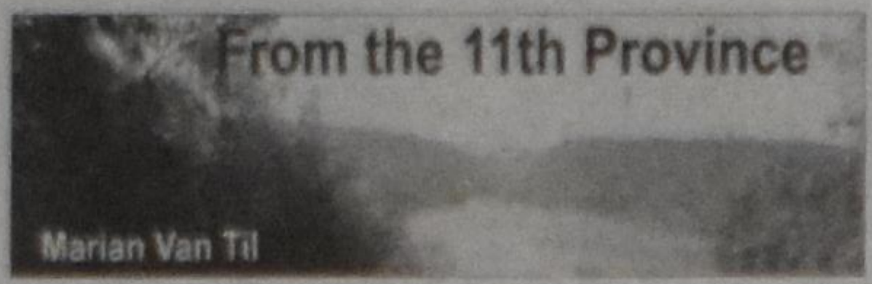
How do we simplify our lives? By prioritizing. Simple living is about stripping away what doesn't matter to focus on what does. I don't believe we have to drop out of everything extracurricular altogether, but I do think we have to set some limits so we can leave time open to spend together as a family.

In our house, each of our kids is allowed to enroll in one extracurricular activity. For some – like Sean, who's involved in Army Cadets, and Tia, who plays soccer – that activity always stays the same. For another – Jamie, who plays school sports – the activity shifts with the seasons. (Currently it's volleyball). And for one other – Kelly, our 11-year-old renaissance girl – the activity constantly changes. Kelly has taken gymnastics, studied cooking, and played the violin. Switching things up works for her; she has many varied interests.

Churches need to simplify

In addition to their one after-school event, each of our kids is involved in an age-appropriate church group. We see these groups as one of the ways in which we can ensure our kids learn God's will for their lives. Unfortunately, churches can often use some simplifying too. In our case, for much of the year there are three evenings per week in which one of our family members is away from home because they're at the church building. We have a daughter who attends junior high youth group on Tuesdays, a son who goes to senior high youth group on Wednesdays, and a daughter who frequents GEMS on Thursdays. Each program is only an hour and a half long, but when you take into account driving time, supper, homework and a decent bed time, there aren't many minutes left over for all of us to spend together. Wouldn't it be great if every church had the room and resources to hold all of their youth programs on the same night? Living simply is a lifestyle choice. It's about living an examined life in which we've determined what's important for each of us. It's about discarding the extras and investing the time we then get back into our families. Living simply is a worthwhile thing to do. The benefits we receive when we live simply are simply invaluable.

Denise Dykstra lives with her husband and five children in Edmonton, Alberta. She attends the West End Christian Reformed Church. Her email address is dykstras@telus.net



On coveting, comfort, tithing & 'chance'

Marian Van Til

My husband, Ed, and I live next door to a retired couple who are devout Christians. The man is a recovered alcoholic and fervent evangelical. His wife is also an enthusiastic spreader of the Word; she is Catholic. They are wealthy but in most respects live modestly – modestly by the suburban standards of our pleasant neighborhood. They do own a boat and a second home in California where their daughter and her family live, and where they spend half of each year. But they're the kind of people who go to greasy-spoon diners to eat out (albeit four times a week), and who pay with cash, even for their California home and the car they bought last year. The husband tithes religiously (pardon the pun) ten per cent of their sizable monthly income to Christian missions and causes.

The wife, not having grown up with what she calls "tithing and alming," took years to get accustomed to her husband's habit. She felt he ought to be giving more money to *her*. To put that into a kind of perspective, she has twice as much monthly spending money as my own income from my writing and music; and my husband and I are surely not in want. "Enough" is relative.

She now says that tithing is right and that they see God's blessing because of it. There's an odd thing about that blessing. In a not untypical Catholic habit, the wife plays the lottery, mostly "scratch-and-win" tickets. She says she has cut way back on what she spends on that enterprise, but she still wins frequently. Then she often gives part of her winnings away (if only to her husband). I admit I'm a bit envious of her. Getting an instant $50 for a $1 or $5 pay-out would come in handy often enough. She has never won big money but she's clearly fascinated by the possibility and she always tells me when she hears about somebody who has.

To me, with my parental family's financially precarious and austerely Reformed background, her habit, and especially her uncanny knack for winning, is astounding. My father would flatly denounce – and often did when he was alive – participating in any game of chance, even something as "innocent" as bingo.

He's got the lottery in his hands

Being a daily Bible reader and having inherited my father's Reformed outlook, I of course believe, and ardently, that God is in control of all things. As the *Heidelberg Catechism* says, Nothing happens by chance, but everything comes from his fatherly hand. My neighbor's winnings are also in his hand. And so is God's apparent steadfast refusal to allow me to win even one lousy buck (on the few occasions I've actually bought a couple $1 scratch-and-win tickets).

I don't mean to rehash the Reformed stance on lotteries. We know where we stand, and our disapproving stance is a minority one in our world, to be sure. But so are our positions on many issues that are part of a biblically Christian worldview. That shouldn't deter us. I'm instead interested in why my neighbor appears to be blessed in her slightly nefarious, ongoing instant-win enterprise and why I am not (in my sporadic and haphazard – and therefore less nefarious? – one).

I can't answer for my neighbor. For myself I've concluded that I prove God's "rule." God did not create us for idleness, and he intends us to work for our bread. He doesn't expect us to rely on "chance" perceived to be outside his control to pay for life's necessities (much less for our tithe). He also knows what lurks in each fallen human heart. That's why one of the commands he had to issue his people says: *Do not covet*.

Forced to the straight and narrow

If I have a besetting sin I confess that it is coveting. I thank God for blessing me with intelligence, talent and material comfort. Yet my life and career have not gone as I expected. Inspite of my two master's degrees, I do not have the kind of financially comfortable, prestigious white-collar job I assumed I'd have when I idealistically began my post-academic life. God led me in a different way, down a path that has required me – often *forced* me – to constantly rely on his care for my health and daily bread. He knows I would have gotten much too comfortable with my life as *I* had it worked out. And in *my* plan, I thought coveting wouldn't be an issue; I would have had enough money to buy whatever I needed – or wanted. And some to give away.

That would have been a disaster for both my spiritual life and my personality (and those around me who had to put up with me!).God knew that I needed a somewhat harder, narrower way in order to stay close to him, one that would require vigilance about not allowing myself to be *too* materially comfortable; one that would insist that I work harder than I wanted to for my money – and one that included saving me from even occasional lottery winnings!

Marian Van Til was a CC editor from 1984-2000. She and her husband live in Youngstown, NY, where Marian is writing her second book, Confessions of a Cataholic, *due out this fall. She welcomes email at: marian-vantil@roadrunner.com.*

Snapshots from street level

Brent van Staalduinen

A universal truth of public-transit: we will find it wherever God leads us. Cities, towns, villages, the roads in front of farms. We tend to find it where the workers are, where the people who win the bread start and finish their days. It might not be stable or clean, but it will be there.

There's a little man, maybe five years old, who's fixated on the foreigners. We've become used to the second-glances, but Seoul-ites are pretty used to the *way-guk-een* on their subways and in their buses. This little guy is not. He cannot resist the urge to turn one-eighty and stare and finally gives in to the urge to tell someone – his preoccupied mother – what he sees. His proclamation: a loud "Amma... way-guk-een!" as though our very presence is newsworthy.

An emergency stop by the side of a Syrian highway on the way back from Palmyra. Something isn't sitting right, and it won't wait for the terminal. Squatting behind a tree in a desert orchard, we joke about what we would do if the bus just left us there. It's not an impossibility: this stop was already grace. The Damascenes smile patiently at us when we re-board; we sense every person in every seat knows exactly what we've been up to. Grace is big here: Paul knew it too.

You'd call the driver a speed-demon, but know not to say those things out loud. He's hurtling towards the Bangkok airport so fast even the tuk-tuks have lost their definition. The Hino diesel roars and surges as the old bus dodges between cars, pedestrians, and traffic signals, but the fare-collector just smiles and makes his way down the aisle, clacking his tin change-case. In a 21st century Bangkok, you can't assume he's getting his serenity from Buddha, but he looks at peace, so perhaps I will get to meet my wife's plane on time.

You shall know them by the sway

Another universal truth of public transit: the veterans stand out. You know them by the sway. Sailors get their sea-legs; seasoned public-transiters seem to maintain perfect balance no matter the state of the road, the steepness of the hill. They can read, chat on their cell phones and sip a cup of morning coffee all at the same time. Elbow to elbow, you come to marvel at the perfect snap of the transit paper, a minimum of fuss, to get to the next page.

In Luxor, there are routes, but no signs. Minivan buses drive up and down the main strip, doors wide open, and Pharaoh's distant cousins are drivers, passengers, and fare-collectors. You give your paltry fare to the guy in front of you, who gives it to the guy in front of him, and on to the driver, who smokes, makes change, gossips, and narrowly avoids the donkeys. There are no stops, merely imperceptible slow-downs, and the commuters get to work on their timing.

It's 50 degrees Celsius outside – 122 degrees Fahrenheit – and thankfully the air-con is working. The bus is jammed with Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi labourers who breathe together, back to back, shoulder to shoulder and nose to underarm. Bollywood provides the common denominator of movie clips and Hindi pop videos. The Kuwaiti sun blasts the landscape outside: we're blasted by happy endings ushered in by perfectly mustachioed leading men and sari-clad beauties. After 14-hour days, the heat-stunned workers aren't complaining. We thank the Lord for the cool air inside as dozens of sun-baked mosques flash by.

The final universal truth: some people won't use it. But you will, and get to see the people, get to know them just a little bit more. It's hard to connect to Adam's descendants from a four-seat, air-conditioned bubble. There's Truth at street-level, even more so when you have to use your feet and public transit to experience it.

Brent van Staalduinen is a high school IB English teacher working in Seoul, South Korea.

Giving up / Giving in

Words from Wild Horses
Kenny Warkentin

Hang on

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: the world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.
Revelations 11:15

Today, as I pondered yet another friend who has at the moment given up the battle, who is now being deceived by the greatest liar, I asked the Lord, why? Why are so many of our friends falling away, giving up the fight saying: "This is too hard, I can't do it or I'm tired of fighting this"!

I think, how many more will fall away, allow themselves to believe the lies that are being spoken to them, whispering into their ears, mind, and hearts, that their desires and feelings are the measuring stick of who they are. This summer has been a hard summer regarding the falling away, the slow creeping of friends not able to endure the race set before them – the marathon of their lives.

What stirred me as I reflect and pray is the magnitude of the fight – the fight against the enemy that is prowling around, looking for people to devour. Not respecting age, degree or profession, he seeks to deceive, hurt and wound all people. In that wounding we make decisions usually out of a deep sense of shame.

Upstream swim

So often we feel alone, faced with a future of doubt, shame and desires that go contrary to the Word of God and his design for our lives. We struggle with addiction, gender identity, food, entertainment, low self worth, and we battle against these feelings, these desires. So often we do this alone. Yet what happens when we are submersed in community and still feel alone; still feel that we cannot escape that aloneness?

How often in that aloneness of our struggle do we just give up? Rather than go against all odds, go against culture, go against the "this feels so good," "I deserve this," "I need this"! Having gone through Living Waters and now involved in the ministry, I have battled and continue to battle the journey set before me. I have met others who are also pressing on despite obstacles, hardships, loss, fear and pain. Knowing what they need to do, having gained wisdom and understanding through the ministry of Living Waters, they press on.

The fate of the accuser

This year, I have witnessed a giving up! First hand, watching friends give up! It breaks my heart each time I hear about it. It's painful to watch the falling away of those I love to something that is just a false sense of intimacy, a false sense of love, a false sense of identity. When I pray for those who have turned their backs and given up, I am often drawn to the book of Revelations.

"It has come at last: salvation and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down to earth, the one who accuses them before our God day and night. And they have defeated him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony." (Revelations 12:10-11)

It goes on to say that the dragon (who was thrown down to earth) pursues the woman and the child, wanting to kill them. I wonder, is this the picture of what the enemy is doing to us? There is an enemy who has little time, and the one focus he has is to kill us, to make our testimony null and void. He knows that our testimony is a powerful weapon. It sets captives free.

Hope after all

This summer, some of my friends were taken out, but not for long! I believe that the work God began in them will be completed. I pray, fast and intercede on their behalf. I worship the Lord, fall down on my face, as I face his glory and holiness. Lord, let your kingdom fall on our friends and loved ones, let your love and mercy and grace be upon them, rending their hearts to you, causing them to turn back to you – the truth, the light and the real love they are looking for. Come, Lord Jesus, come. May your wrath be turned away from them. Draw them back to you in your extreme love and mercy. Pour it over their minds, heart and their spirit. *Cast them not away; take not the Holy Spirit from within them. Restore unto them the joy of your salvation, and renew a right spirit within them.*

To those who continue to persevere I say, "Do it with all your strength. Forsake all else to follow after your Saviour Jesus, who set you free. He has given you the authority, the power to stand firm. Never waiver, but focus on the prize set before you. Don't give up! Do whatever you need to not give up. And may you know that your Heavenly Father is very proud of you. As he thinks about you, he spins wildly in the heavens.

Kenny Warkentin (paintpent@mts.net) is an avid blogger, thinker and artist.

Getting Unstuck
Arlene Van Hove

Meeting the purging challenge with formidable HELP!

Simplicity is savouring life… It's being charmed by the ceramic bowl on your kitchen table every time you see it, rather than having so many ceramic bowls that you no longer notice any of them.
Victoria Maron

My daughter is backing a truck into the driveway. She stops just in front of the garage and jumps out.

"I don't need a truck," I tell her.

"Yes, you do," she says firmly, as I watch her eying my full garage with her hands on her hips. There are three groups of possessions in the centre of the garage. One is "to keep," the second one is "to throw out," and the third is "to Sally Ann."

"Your 'throw out pile' is not big enough," she says. I shrug my shoulders and tell her

"That has always been my problem…."

"Right," she says studying the scene, "you keep on sorting and leave the throwing out to me."

"On the condition you will let me have a last look before you leave my driveway," I negotiate.

"Done deal," she says with a smile on her face.

In the end, gone are my unpolished copper pots, various silverware items, large aluminum pans, boxes of books, unused ski equipment, a large chair, excess dishes and other household items I no longer use. All of it went to Sally Ann. My "throw out pile" increased only minimally, affirming what I already knew … I am hanging on to unused things. At the same time, my daughter never did give me a last look before sneaking away with the truck in mid afternoon. So, I am feeling I am missing something.

A calmer sense of space and time

Simple living and becoming organized is not the same. I could have organized every extraneous item in my house, but I would not necessarily be living simply. As Victoria Moran says so eloquently in her book *Shelter for the Spirit*, living simply includes simplifying our home environment by getting rid of excess items leading to a calmer sense of space and time. At the same time, simplicity is not giving up what we need. It is having everything we need with the bonus of being able to find it! And simplicity is not boring! Contrary to popular belief, the alternative to incessant activity and acquisition is not vast emptiness. Instead we can experience life more fully than ever.

Changing priorities

The reality is, cluttered rooms and complicated schedules interfere with our ability to treasure the moment. Unfortunately, our homes or apartments where some of our best moments can be experienced, seem to attract clutter and complication like a

magnet. As for me, I made the choice years ago to seek a university education, be involved in volunteer work and, eventually, paid work in the community while raising four children. This choice put household organization as the least of my priorities. Even during these last years when I am not employed outside the home, I continue to put this chore on the back burner. Until, one day, I became so tired of sorting through my unused things trying to find one memorable item, I finally acknowledged I was wasting valuable time.

The next time I had coffee with the above daughter I said, "I can no longer live with the piled up clutter in the garage." My daughter replied "The junk bothers you so much it keeps you from enjoying the things that are good in your life." I said "you got it!" And so, my daughter being on maternity leave, suggested we begin tackling it together. She scribbled the dates she would come over on the calendar, and suddenly becoming organized with a hope of a simpler life became a priority!

Begin to purge

Since then I learned that organizing a cluttered home is a project in process. And so, here are my five surefire ways to begin to tackle this challenge. The first is giving it a priority (finally) in our life. The second way is having help from someone who is not emotionally attached to our piled up possessions. The third is to set times and dates for doing this work and sticking to it. The fourth surefire way is to make a plan for at least the first part of the work that needs to be done. Home clutter usually falls into two broad categories. The first is "memory clutter" – the stuff that reminds us of important people, things or places. The second is "I might need it one day" clutter. This was my issue, and I learned that this "one day" rarely comes. Finally, the fifth way is to continue to work towards an ongoing plan but, at the same time, have a deadline for when the project needs to be finished. For me, my study is next, but the date for the completion of the whole project is Dec. 1 allowing me 30 days grace, bringing me to the New Year.

So far, I feel not only elated by the tidiness of our garage, I feel more at peace every time I come home … even though I cannot find my ski boots. But then, I have not worn them for over ten years.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

Pastoral Excellence

Sabbatical: a healthy distance

Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen

From a distance the world looks blue and green
and the snow-capped mountains white
From a distance the ocean meets the stream
and the eagle takes to flight.

The lyrics of this 90s-era Bette Midler hit, "From a Distance," imply that eyeing a situation from afar offers a healthy change in perspective. Many pastors are discovering that, too. After years in parish ministry, a sabbatical can provide a much-needed opportunity to contemplate ministry "from a distance".

Opportunities for reflection and renewal are important in a profession where growing numbers of pastors are opting out of ministry mid-career. According to the Christian Reformed Church's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence website, nearly 20 percent – one in five – pastors suffer stress and burnout.

"The parish ministry is the kind of position that has a knack for slowly and insidiously draining a person's resources – physically, emotionally and spiritually," says Rev. Cecil Van Niejenhuis, who, until recently, served a church in Edmonton, Alberta, and now works with the office of Pastor-Church Relations for the Christian Reformed Church. "The pace of life and of ministry is such that people simply get worn down."

Leonard Diepeveen is chair of council at All Nations Christian Reformed Church in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia. He has seen firsthand how years in ministry can sap a pastor's energy. "Our pastor had been here for seven years, straight out of seminary. So that's a lot of new sermons, a lot of new situations, without any time to recharge," says Diepeveen.

Last year, All Nations' council members began to work with their pastor, Rev. Dave Vroege, to support him in developing and implementing a sabbatical plan, something the church also offered to the previous pastor. Vroege will begin his three-month sabbatical this December. "Churches should be aware that pastors do burn out and do need time to recharge," Diepeveen says. "They need time to disengage and to think systematically about their ministry, to spend time in a more relaxed setting for prayer and meditation, and to reconnect with family and their calling – all of which can be obscured by the pressures of week-to-week ministry."

A Restorative Distance

Sabbaticals provide the opportunity to look at one's ministry in new ways. "Having been on sabbatical, it's like you've benefited from sitting on the balcony and viewing things from afar," says Van Niejenhuis. "After a sabbatical, you feel ready to take your place once again on the main floor. You come back refreshed and ready to engage in your work again. You think more calmly – and therefore more clearly – and are surely more efficient."

"During sabbatical, I gained some clarity about what our church needed," says Rev. Jon Huizenga, who pastors River Rock CRC in Rockford, Michigan. Huizenga recently benefited from a four-month sabbatical. "I came back and led a very effective 'vision into action' process that we needed. I hadn't realized that we needed it until I was away."

Rev. Dave Vroege, All Nations CRC, is looking forward to sabbatical in December and hopes that it will renew his calling for ministry. "The weekly and monthly responsibilities [of parish ministry] do weigh heavy on me many times and, over several years, it has given me a sense of long-term fatigue," he says. "As heavy as I feel pastoring to be at times, I do still feel called to it, and I hope that the sabbatical will reinvigorate me for that call."

Healthy for Families, too

Sabbatical benefits extend beyond pastor to family, too. "Ministry is consuming not just for the pastor but for the whole family," says Jon Huizenga. "At some level your whole family's relationships are affected by how the church is going. Sabbaticals provide a temporary, restorative distance from that consuming life."

For that reason, Huizenga encourages pastors to plan their sabbaticals with family in mind. Family time was built into his sabbatical plan, including one trip with his spouse and two family trips. "Make your sabbatical at least family-friendly," says Huizenga. "It's possible that a sabbatical could be a time of stress for a family as a husband or wife goes off for an extended class somewhere. The result? The pastor has a sabbatical, but his or her marriage takes a hit."

Time and Space

Sabbaticals are not all about pastoral health, however. Through sabbaticals, churches win as well. "The church benefits by having a rejuvenated pastor return to them, a pastor who may feel a new sense of calling to the congregation," Diepeveen says.

Vroege is convinced that his sabbatical experience will be a blessing to members of his church by allowing them to take on new tasks and discover new gifts. "A sabbatical can allow parishioners time and space to engage in congregational ministry in new ways," Vroege says. "However a congregation decides to handle pastoral duties in the pastor's absence, some congregants will likely have to do a few new things and may even find themselves freshly considering what congregational life and ministry is about."

During his recent sabbatical, Huizenga definitely found that to be the case. "The church gained confidence in the staff and board as they led professionally and lovingly in my absence," says Huizenga. "Since I am the founding pastor, it was excellent for my young church to see that there could be healthy life without me present."

Sabbaticals remind churches that no pastor is indispensable, according to Van Neijenhuis. "During sabbatical, the church actually manages quite nicely without your presence," he says. "This is important for both pastor and congregation to sense."

Sabbatical Tips

Develop a Sabbatical Policy

"Put a sabbatical policy in your letter of call, so the pastor doesn't need to bring it up him or herself," advises Leonard Diepeveen. All Nations drew on the experiences of other churches when developing their policy. There are more than 50 examples of church sabbatical policies on the Christian Reformed Church's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) website. Check them out at http://www.crcna.org/pages/spe_sabbaticals.cfm.

Make a Plan and Apply for Funding

Many pastors are able to secure funding to cover part, or all, of their sabbatical costs. "Applying for grant funding forced me and my church to propose a well-thought-out, fully-endorsed sabbatical plan well in advance," Huizenga says. "The financial support

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Mildred Budge: cleaning house

Daphne Simpkins

When the Sunday school teacher, who was a retired public school teacher like Mildred, began her morning's lesson with the question, "How many of you are living with too much clutter? there was the predictable laughter that rippled around the room as if to confess, "Oh, yes, I am a sinner."

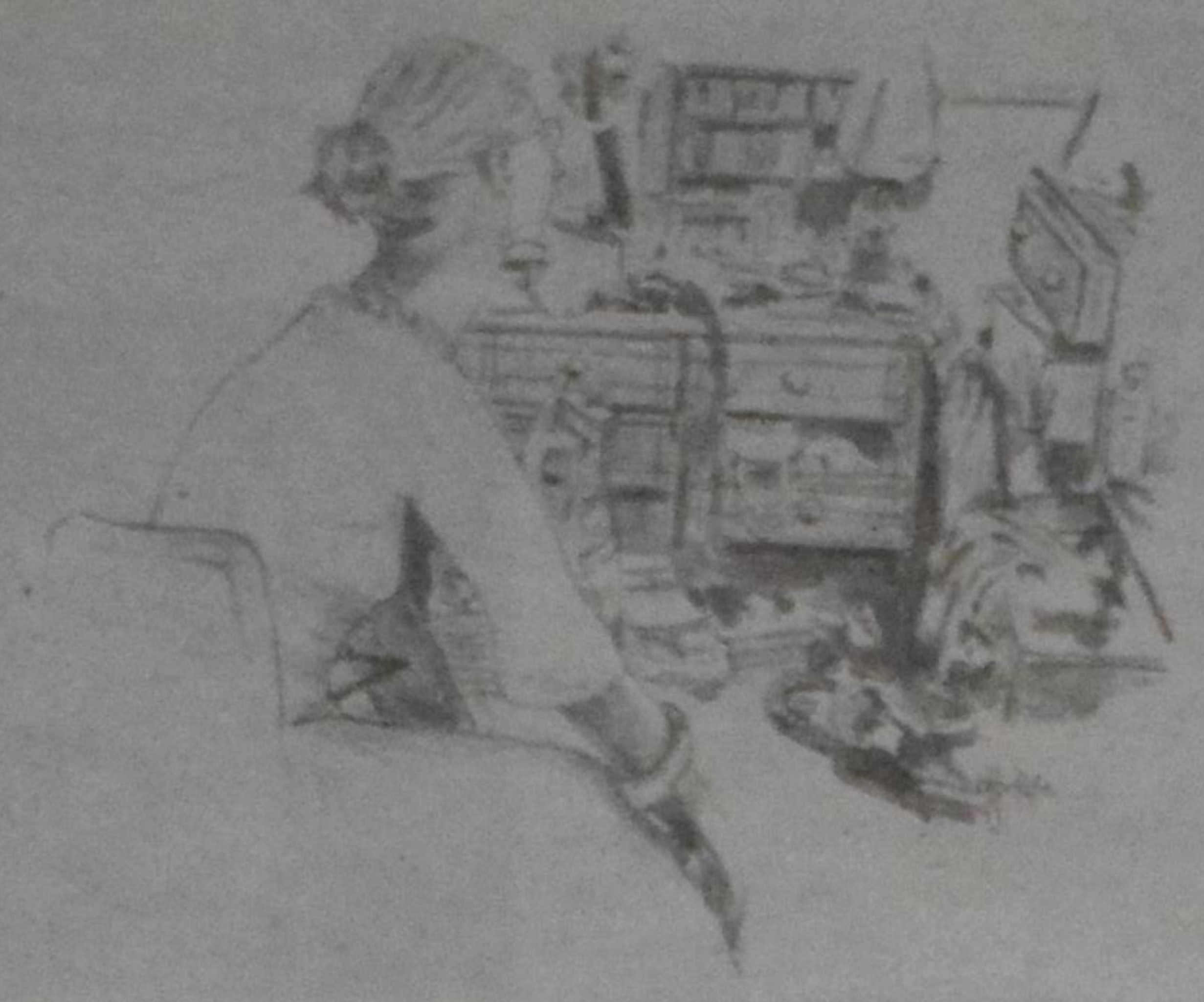
There is a time in an older woman's more seasoned life when she is so accustomed to acknowledging the reality of sin that she readily confesses to almost any type of trespass in order to keep other sinners company. It is considered polite church-going behavior.

Still, the women sat back a bit more firmly in their metal chairs, planted both feet on the ground (for it was not standard practice to cross their legs as they had years before when they had also worn high heels) and waited for the next shoe to drop – rather, the next question that this educator trained in the Socratic method asked: "Why do you live with so much clutter? You can't take it with you. Isn't it weighing you down?"

Well, of course it was weighing them all down, Mildred thought, almost irritably, for as much as she enjoyed being with and getting along with her friends at church, sometimes she longed for the opportunity to be at church without feeling condemned over some aspect of her humanity, and she was human after all.

Sure, she needed to clean house.

Sure, she needed to weed out the kitchen catch-all drawer with its collection of rubber bands, loose batteries, twist-ties, and recipes torn raggedly out of the daily newspaper. She had cleaned the drawer out many times before, but it always ended up like it was now: full of stuff that she had to plow through to find what she needed, but what she needed was usually there.



But even if that crowded kitchen drawer did not condemn her, there were other pockets of clutter around her house, and Mildred knew right where they were. They were the places in closets where she hadn't vacuumed the floor in a long time because there were too many pairs of shoes and the top shelf was jammed because it was hard to let go of some garments that once upon a time had felt like home against her skin. No, really, that red shiny pantsuit didn't fit her anymore, but it used to look great on her – and there was a chance that she might lose twenty pounds and be able to wear it again. To let it go symbolized giving up hope that she would ever lose that twenty pounds.

And the sewing box – the one she didn't use for mending clothes – was the one her mother had given her on her sixteenth birthday. It rested on the floor underneath the red shiny pantsuit and was so valuable that Mildred had requested in her will that it be buried with her. The peach-lined sewing box contained artifacts of history so intimate that she had to be at her strongest – and usually holding a glass of champagne on New Year's Eve – to sort through it.

It held her mother's favorite pair of sewing scissors, the measuring gauge her mother had used to teach Mildred how to hem skirts, packets of pins with plastic colored caps that made her smile because they were colorful – almost silly, and spools of thread that once upon a time were the perfect match for garments long since given to the Faith Rescue Mission. When she pulled out a thread it usually broke from age. That old. Underneath those aged spools were three different packets of love letters that she hadn't read in years. They made her smile to see them, but she felt no need to read them. She knew exactly what they said.

Sarah leaned forward on the podium and confessed, "My house is so crowded now that I don't have any room left to store anything else. What can I do?" she asked, and there was a hint of real inquiry in her voice, a kind of beseechment as if the woman who usually knew the answers to her own questions didn't know the answer to this one.

But it appeared that other women did, for they began to raise their hands and offer house cleaning techniques that were designed to declutter.

First you do this. Then, you do that.

Ladies smiled, for they had heard the tips many times and said them often to others, especially young brides who in the early days of keeping a house were perplexed: so many wedding gifts and so little space to store them all.

At last, without even a nod to scripture, a woman who rarely spoke raised a gentle hand and reported, "I asked my husband if I were to die would he marry again, and he said that he most likely would. And I said, well if you do, are you going to let her wear my clothes? And he said, if they fit, he saw no reason why she shouldn't wear them, and I said, are you going to let her have my jewelry too? And he said, well, you won't be here, and if I love her, I don't see why she shouldn't wear the jewelry that is a symbol of my love, and I said to him, are you going to let her go through my drawers and closets? And he said, well, if it is her house, I expect she will because women are in charge of the drawers and the closets."

The wise woman took a deep breath, and let that prophecy take hold. The room was deathly quiet. Then, she added succinctly, "My will is completely up-to-date, and my house has been decluttered ever since."

The woman who rarely spoke became quiet then, her hands resting in her lap, and Mildred marveled once again how wise it is to talk little, so that when you do speak people listen carefully. As Mildred looked around the room she saw wide-eyed women considering who might take their place if they were called to Glory sooner than their husbands, and she saw that even as they considered the state of their closets and drawers they were also imagining that there were women sitting right there in that room who might become the second wife of their present husband after their deaths.

A restlessness pervaded the room as Sarah finally read the scripture of the day that warned against covetousness. Women who were usually very good at sitting still were like a line of horses at the starting gate waiting for the signal so that they could run the race set before them. It was a very determined race to go home and clean out closets and drawers and add codicils to wills appointing which daughter, granddaughter or niece would inherit her jewelry, while they cast half-angry, half-disappointed glances at husbands who said to each other later before the evening service began, "I didn't get my nap today. My old girl came home from Sunday School with a bee in her bonnet about housecleaning, and she had me carrying bags out to the trunk of the car so that I can tote them to the Mission tomorrow."

"Me, too," the men said, one after another.

Mildred did not have a husband to help her clean house, but she swooped down upon the kitchen drawer alone and ruthlessly cleaned it out. Like her sisters who were cleaning out their houses, she did feel better, lighter. Then, she turned her attention to the over-flowing sewing basket and decided that she could let the spools of old thread go, but that was all. The love letters remained next to her mother's scissors and the hemming gauge. She tossed six pairs of shoes (so she could vacuum) and an armful of clothes that no longer fit, except the red pantsuit. She kept that red pantsuit. A woman needed hope and her memories, especially the memory – which wasn't clutter – of how she had looked and felt once upon a time.

Daphne Simpkins (DaphneSimpkins@[illegible]odigy.net) has been writing "The Adventures of Mildred Budge" for the past two years. Before she became Miss Budge's biographer, she wrote a memoir of her father's journey through Alzheimer's disease: The Long Good Night.

Sabbatical *... continued from p. 18*

made the activities we did possible and also provided full funding support for the staff changes we made during my absence." A list of grants, planning aids and other resources is also available on the SPE's website at http://www.crcna.org/pages/spe_sabbaticals.cfm.

Strive for A Healthy Balance

"Don't think of sabbatical as a time to produce something," says Van Nienjenhuis. "This is not extra vacation time that needs to be justified or rationalized somehow. This is the congregation offering pastoral care – as in care for the pastor. It is part of maintaining health, and the key notion is that in order to be a healthy leader, a pastor must be a healthy person."

"Find the right balance between activity and rest," advises Vroege. "I believe this will be different for different pastors. In my case, I think it's important to do what I can to not overdo it and so come back frazzled rather than refreshed."

With the right balance, sabbatical can work wonders for weary pastors and their families, while empowering worshippers. If you are part of a church that hasn't offered sabbatical in the past, maybe now is the time to discover the difference that a healthy distance can make.

Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen is a writer and consultant specializing in communications for nonprofit organizations. She and her husband, Peter, have four children and live in Fall River, Nova Scotia, where they attend All Nations CRC.

Sabbatical Reading List

Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning by Richard Bullock and Richard Bruesehoff. Alban Institute, 2000

The Spiritual Leader's Guide to Self-Care by Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley. Alban Institute, 2002.

The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction by Eugene H. Peterson. Eerdmans, 1993.

Journeying toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals by Melissa Sevier and Melissa Bane. Alban Institute, 2002.

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Gé Spaans (905) 477-1243, Jannie Thomas (416) 498-8706,
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We thank you from the bottom of our hearts because it is thanks to you that we have been able to raise the overwhelming amount of $125,000.00.

For the Committee,
Gé Spaans, President

Bienke's story (part IX)

This is part nine of the life of Jacobina Wilhelmina Radsma, née Vlaar, as told to her daughter Marion. The series will continue in following issues.

After a year in Canada, we bought our first car. Adam went with a farm hand to Toronto and came back with a 1939 Chevy. I think Adam paid about $100.00 for it. Driving lessons were pretty casual in those days. Fortunately, there wasn't as much traffic on the roads, either, since Adam had

to learn driving just the way he learned English – not too much practice, mostly real-life experience!

We ended up staying on the Culp farm for three years. From there we moved to Ontario Street, to the Robertson farm – on a site long since converted to super stores and parking lots. When we were there, our little stucco house stood beside a barn with a terrific hay loft for the kids to dive into and fronted acres of fruit orchard. The crab apple tree beside the house burst into pink splendour every spring.

During the three years we lived on Ontario Street, our third daughter Annette Margot was born – a beautiful eleven pound infant. Born on June 20th, 1957, she welcomed summer in for us. We named her after my mother Antje and my oldest sister Maartje.

Adam, who had started Canadian life labouring on local farms to become more familiar with the English language, was ready for a change. In Holland he had been an insurance agent. He wanted to return to the insurance business, so we left the farm where we had been quite comfortable. We moved to a home on Chelsea St, a much more urban neighbourhood. We stayed there for only a few months – and came away from there with head lice, or at least Marion and Rini did! The Chelsea St house was across the street from a very dirty family; the kids there constantly wanted to come over and play at our house and listen to the stories I read. I had not the heart to send them away, although the other neighbours had warned us.

The insurance business in Canada at that time – at least with the company Adam had joined – was a very different business from the one he had left in Holland. In Holland, Adam felt that he was there to help his clients obtain insurance that would give them levels of financial security appropriate to their needs. Now he felt he was forced to sell clients the most insurance he could force on them, whether or not it was right for them. In Holland he had been the top insurance agent for his firm; with this Canadian company it seemed he was too honest to make a go of it.

The green cottage

Our next house lay in a Firelane just outside St. Catharines, among fruit orchards that spread between Lakeshore Road and Lake Ontario. We called it the Green Cottage. Although it had no central heating or even indoor plumbing, we stayed there for three years. Adam built us an indoor W.C. by the simple expedient of putting a commode over a slops bucket in the basement – a bucket which Opa emptied everyday in the hole dug for the outdoor john. We also had a huge water reservoir in the basement to store rainwater although we sometimes had to top up our water supply by ordering clean water to be trucked in. With no running water, we could not shower, so we washed ourselves at the pump in the kitchen. Like the rest of the house except for the living room which had a wood-burning stove, the kitchen was unheated in the winter, so wash-downs were pretty quick – and very chilly! The heavy wool blankets we had taken along from Holland came in very handy too – but boy, was it hard to get out of bed in the mornings when it was very cold.

After we moved into the Green Cottage, Adam became a milkman for Silverwoods Dairy. During our tenure there God blessed us with our second son Marvin John who was born on August 1st, 1960 – and what a boy he was! Adam had to go to work the morning I knew the baby was ready to join the world, so he dropped me off at the hospital on his way; an hour later, when he called the hospital to find out how I was doing, he discovered that he had another son. He dropped everything and rushed to the hospital, saw me briefly to make sure I was OK, and hurried on straight to the baby room. When he asked for Baby Radsma, the nurses looked puzzled: "There's no Baby Radsma here," they told him. Adam said, "This morning I dropped my wife off here. She is here and she is not pregnant anymore. Now where is my son?" The nurses looked again at the name tags and replied, "Here is a Radsma, but he's not a baby – he's a toddler. Look at him – twelve pounds and three ounces is not a baby!"

Again we moved, this time to a white clapboard home on two acres of land near the end of Simpson Road not far from Lake Ontario. I was just pregnant with a new baby; because of the bumping of our moving truck and the stress of the move I lost the baby two days after we moved in and spent the next ten days in the hospital. This was a difficult time for me. Losing a baby for the third time left me feeling depressed. The sadness was coupled with a painful infection and a fever they had trouble bringing down. I had lost my very first baby only two months after conception; between Annette and Marvin I had miscarried; this last one was another heartbreak.

Fostering

About this time, in response to a request in the church bulletin, we started fostering children who needed new homes, sometimes temporarily but often long-term. We accepted our first foster baby from the St. Catharines Children's Aid Society while we lived on Simpson Road; while there, we also briefly had two little preschool sisters and a twelve year old boy. In 1964, a precious six-month old infant joined our family. She quickly stole our hearts and we adopted her permanently, christening her Jacqueline June.

Continued in the following issue.

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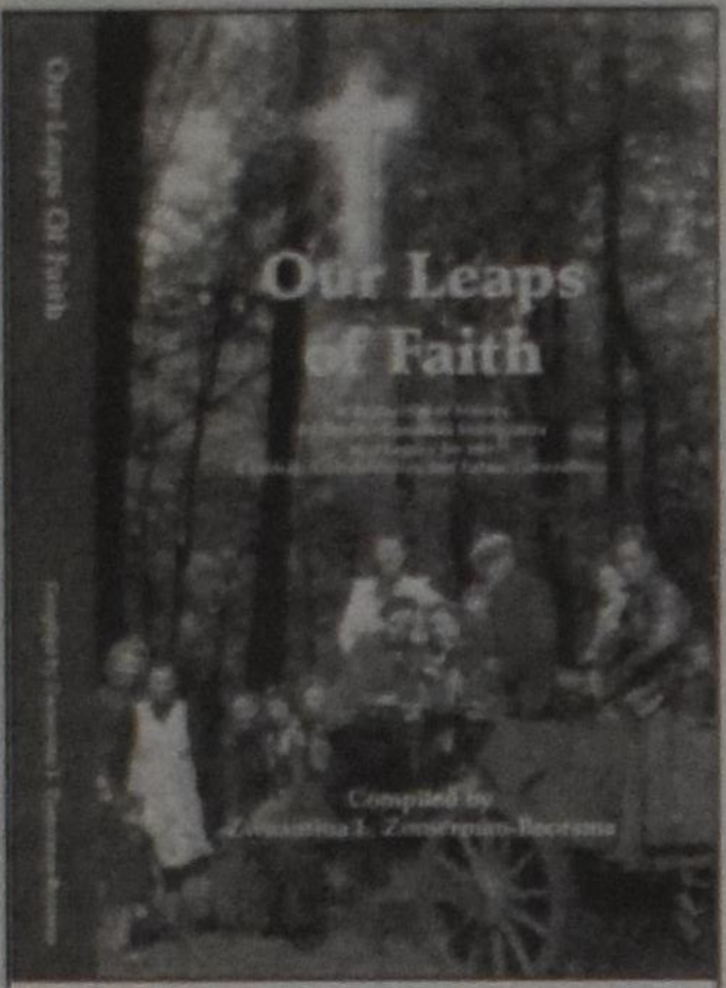

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Oct 23 Ambassadors Celebration. 40 years. Calvin Christian School, **Hamilton**, ON. Call 905-389-2104 to reserve.

Oct 24 Hamilton Young Adult reunion for Young Adults of the late 70s and early 80s. Theme Find Us Faithful. Time 9:00 a.m. til 4:00 p.m. at Mountainview CRC, **Grimsby.** Visit our website http://youngadults.my-event.com for details or call Jake Ellens at 519-448-4321or email hamiltonyoungadult@yahoo.ca.

Oct 24 Leendert Kooij and the OCMA choir, Quartet and Brass do a "Benefit Concert," for Eurovangelism. At St. George's Anglican Church, 99 Woolwich St. Guelph, 7:30. Special offering for missions.

Oct 26 Seniors Day at Redeemer Universiry College, Ancaster. Registration starts at 9:30 am. See ad Sep 28 issue for details or see www.christiancourier.ca and click on events.

Nov 20 Christian Festival Concert at 7:30 p.m. at the Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto. Call 416-636-9779 or email landmkooy@rogers.com See Ad.

Nov. 21, 22 Immanuel CRC, **Hamilton**, ON, 50th anniversary. See ad p.22

Nov 27 The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS) invites you to the retirement dinner and celebration for Dr. Adriaan Guldemond at Kings Christian Collegiate, Oakville, ON. RSVP by Nov.13. Contact Samantha at 905-648-2100 or samanthab@oacs.org.

Nov. 29 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m.

2010

June 26, 27 Come celebrate the 50th anniversary of HCCS (formerly Athens Christian School). Contact us at www.hccs.ca or 613 498 4176.

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The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools invites you to the retirement dinner and celebration for

Dr. Adrian Guldemond

Friday, November 27th, 2009

Cost $40/person

at Kings Christian Collegiate
528 Burnhamthorpe Road West, Oakville, Ontario.

5:30 p.m. Social, 6:00 p.m. Dinner (semi-formal)

RSVP by November 13, 2009
For payment options and to reserve your tickets, contact Samantha at 905-648-2100 or samanthab@oacs.org

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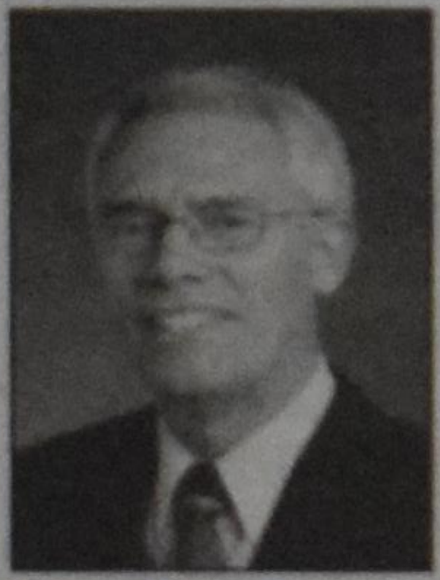

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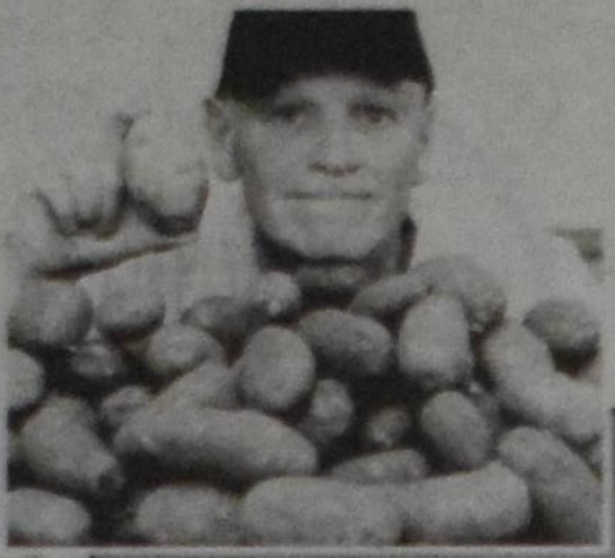
News

The Great Potato Giveaway

Angela Reitsma Bick



EDMONTON, Alberta – On Saturday, September 26, Gordon Visser lost $20,000 worth of potatoes – on purpose. Visser feels so strongly about protecting the unique soil in central Alberta from urban sprawl that he cooked up an idea to let city-dwellers experience an urban farm. He teamed up with the Edmonton Potato Growers and the Greater Edmonton Alliance for the Great Potato Giveaway. They opened up the gates to his farm at 9 a.m. ,allowing strangers into his fields to collect potatoes and each take a fifty-pound bag home ... for free.

Visser's Norbest Farm is technically within the city limits of Edmonton. The event was so popular that vehicles were lined up along the highway for seven kilometres, causing gridlock. Luckily, the Giveaway was a well-planned operation. Upon arriving, visitors were shown where to park and offered a green bag. Volunteers wore bright orange vests and were happy to answer questions – the most common one being, "Where do I have to sign?" But there was no sign-up sheet, and no strings attached. It was all about the experience: if you wanted potatoes, you had to get your hands dirty by picking them out of the field yourself.

"The idea," Visser said in a phone interview, "was to get the people out to actually see the soil, put their hands in the soil." Many urban people aren't familiar with agriculture, he points out. To remedy that, "they had to grab potatoes off the ground, smell the potatoes," and close the gap between where food is grown and how it's eaten.

Visser had arranged for a potato harvesting machine to dig the potatoes out and place them back lightly on the ground. The harvester broke up about two rows at a time, and people were lined up excitedly by every row, waiting for their turn. The hundreds of expectant faces, turned the same direction, looked like the crowd at a parade. After the machine came by, people would drop to their knees and frantically start collecting the upturned potatoes. The pickers were of every age, every background, every nationality. "It was," Visser concludes, "an incredible day. A holy day."

By the final tally, Norbest Farm gave away 54,000 kilograms (120,000 pounds) of potatoes. That's enough to fill about five 10-wheeler transport trucks.

Getting the point across

I asked Visser if his farm is at risk for development. It's not, but he mourns the loss of land in the Edmonton River valley that has already been paved over, and fears for the remaining, neighbouring farms.

"I've farmed my whole life," he says. "We're Dutch; it's kind of in our blood." Visser's grandfather emigrated from Holland in the 1950s, and Gordon is the third generation of Vissers to farm potatoes in the same spot. Visser sells seed potatoes to growers in the States because this area produces one of the hardiest crop varieties in the world. His brother grows all the other vegetables and sells them at a local market.

"There's nothing as good as this land," he says.

Even though they hadn't planned on it, so many people asked about a petition that the orange-shirted volunteers soon began one. By the end of the day, it had collected hundreds of signatures.

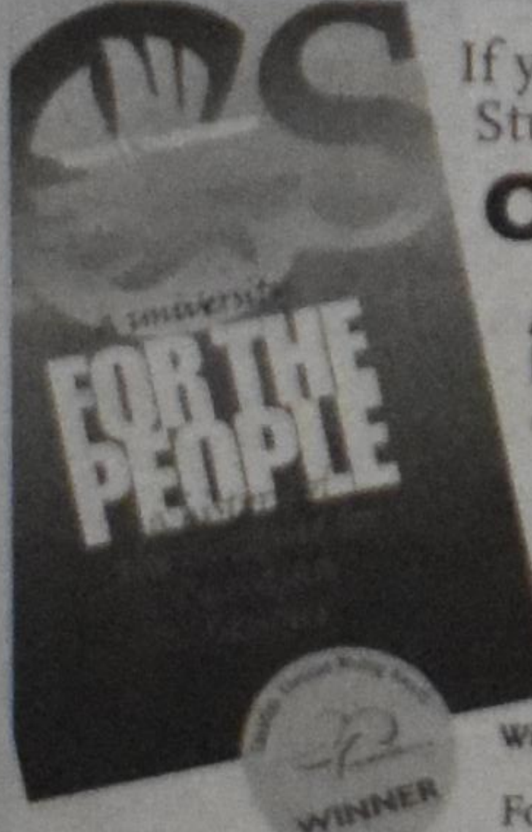
Edmonton City Council is under a lot of pressure to rezone farm land for retail or residential use. They will be debating a pro-farm policy, put forward by the Greater Edmonton Alliance, at an upcoming meeting.

"In the long run, when it becomes more expensive to transport produce, this land will be valuable," Visser says. And although he made national news by his selfless action, Visser – a member of First CRC in Edmonton – remains humble. "It's not about me, it's about the land." Let's hope that, as so many Albertans are enjoying Visser's Russet potatoes over the winter months, they are reminded of the need to save the sandy loam soil that produces such a vegetable.

Non-fiction award for Robert VanderVennen

The Word Guild, an organization that seeks to connect, develop and promote Canadian writers and editors who are Christian, has declared Robert E. VanderVennen winner of their Book—Leadership/Theoretical award for the year 2009. VanderVennen got this award for having written A University for the People: A History of the Institute for Christian Studies. The book scored high marks in such categories as research, readability, originality and sensitivity of treatment.

In a Foreword, Dr. Richard Mouw writes: "Today's Institute can boast of an impressive roster of graduates, a superb record of published scholarship, and a profound impact on servants of the Kingdom around the world. And for all of that, its mission and influence continues to expand." The book is published by Dordt College Press.



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Odds and Trends

Godly contentment

"All the things we use, all the things we make, everything we manipulate, everything we accumulate, derives from the creation itself. If we learn to seek godly contentment as our great gain, we will take and shape less of God's earth. We will demand less from the land. We will leave room for other creatures. We will responsibly exercise dominion over the earth and will preserve it. We will thus allow creation to heal itself and to perpetuate its fruitfulness, to the praise of its Creator."

–Calvin B. DeWitt, *Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues* (Faith Alive Resources 1994).

Bringing together waste and need

Food is a gift from God. And as such, especially when so many people are hungry, it's just not right for good food to go to waste.

This is the belief at the heart of the Fraser Valley Gleaners in Abbotsford, B.C. Through the program and a sister organization, hundreds of volunteers collect and process donated vegetables which may not be marketable: perhaps they're blemished, too small, or a bit wilted. Trimmed and dried, the vegetables make a nutritious soup mix for pennies a cup. Millions of servings are distributed each year through various international relief organizations, bringing waste and need together to lessen both.

"We often feel so helpless, listening to the news. We think, 'I'm just one person; how can I do anything to help?'" says manager Carl Goosen. "Well, every hour a volunteer works here yields the equivalent of 120 servings of soup."

Post – pumpkin carving treat

Wash and dry seeds from the inside of a pumpkin or squash. Toast them in the oven with a little olive oil and salt, and enjoy them as a snack. You can also sprinkle them over salads or soup.

World's easiest pizza dough:

1 heaping teaspoon active dry yeast
1 ¼ cups warm water

Stir together in a warm bowl until yeast is dissolved.

2 cups four
1 cup whole wheat flour
1 teaspoon salt

Add enough flour to make a soft dough. Knead until smooth. Place in a greased bowl, cover with a damp cloth and let rise about 45 mins. Generously grease baking sheet with olive oil. Roll or press dough onto pan. Cover with sauce and favourite toppings. Bake in preheated oven at 400F for 12-15 mins, until cheese is melted.

Excerpts from *Simply in Season*, by Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert (Mennonite Central Committee 2005).